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Clarissa

WITS AND THE WOMAN

BY
VIOLET IRWIN
Author of "The Human Desire"

ILLUSTRATED BY
CHRISTINE T. CURTISS

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TO

MY FRIENDS IN KHAKI

AND THEIR STERN ADVENTURES

WITS AND THE WOMAN

CHAPTER I

Call me one, if you like, at the end of the first chapter and drop it. No apologies by request; and no hurt feelings; for, if I'm not prevaricating, I'm not aiming to make converts or to start anything either. Societies of Coalescent Souls and the Affinity Afflátus don't exist for little Clarissa. They smack of Washington Square, and she's spent enough of her young life in that neighborhood, and doesn't hanker ever to cross its mental or material diagonals again. So this story is just a sorting out, for my own satisfaction, of the experiences of two eventful years; and it's going to be done on my own method, regardless. Of course if you clap several thousand words between two covers, it becomes a book, and the author thereof breaks into the literary ring. I can't dodge the issue. But I'd hate to think of anybody wasting a dollar and a half on my account and being disappointed, so I'll tell the high-brows right off the bat — this is no place for them.

My tale is a good tale, a ninety-five horse power, twelve-cylinder scooter. It gyrates the whole spectrum in color; but there's no more art about it than in a cubist statue; the plot resembles most a ragged bunch of cold slaw; and as for morality in the events — I

but at Buniva's I always felt best in the perpendicular — insufficient nourishment had created standing shadows. I've got to hand it to Madame for making her boarders fit into their niches. Flesh would never have been able to navigate her halls, or squeeze past other fleshies to its own place at the frugal board.

It's a joke all I accomplished in the little bit of less than nothing, my center floor, lighted only from aloft. The first job that glorious day was to dive under the bed, drag out an ironing board and " do up " my best waist which had been washed over night. " Cleanliness is next to godliness," had been one of Granny's favorite maxims, and the old lady was pretty nearly right all through life, except in mistaking a gravel pit for a farm. Cleanliness *is* next to godliness, but the poet neglected to indicate which side, and as touching honors are the same value, I took the liberty of playing them in my own order after I came to New York — just about the time I began wearing my Sunday clothes every day. Fifth Avenue proves how easy style can dispense with beauty, but like as not beauty will get the look over without style. The first slant I took at myself in a plate glass window I knew Clarissa had a chance of both, and then it was me for the rags.

Don't get me wrong. I was never silly about dress or empty headed — quite the contrary. With provocation I could feel big things even then — a bursting sort of fullness inside — music brought it on, and colors and ideas. Some folks gas about aspiration, and I fancy that's the tag. Weather does the same sort of thing to one. Had I been able to throw up a

sash and wallow in that grand October breeze, I might have got intoxicated with the rest. But I put it to you — did anybody ever aspire through a skylight? Instead, I was just fair peeved. By whirlwinding through breakfast I could make a few minutes extra to amble to the shop; I'd have to stand there all day, selling to lucky parasites what my own vanity craved something awful; and by closing time the sun would have scadoodled. Who says discontent isn't high proof of reason?

Bain & Dingley's, the world where I worked, straddles a side street and fills two city blocks with merchandise. Its closed bridges, connecting the old and new buildings, lend it the appearance of a massive hour-glass tipped over; but, though the great store sprawls, it is full of dignity, and its isolation is its strength. Fashion pouring through those bridges, daily, north and south, and the cross-currents of wealth passing under them in every type of motor car, would make the legendary hoards of Bagdad look like thirty cents. My arrival was, of course, timed too early for the glittering show. The grim stone buildings at that hour frowned prisonlike on waking business, with blue blinds still drawn, nursing their emptiness.

Fine days everybody naturally stayed outside till the last tick, and then tried to jam in all together and pull the time clocks on the minute. Miss Stacy got into the middle of our mob, and I had a chance to glare at her well-tailored back. Not that I wanted to be in her shoes — managers and floor walkers are only the cornbeef and cabbage of society, and I always had a taste for caviare. But she was running in a rut miles wider than mine and I respected her. I

guess I was the most surprised of the lot when I found how near she came to a cropper that afternoon.

Seats of the mighty offer one advantage — there's some come and go about them. The king doesn't have to sit on his throne and wear his trimmings all day, whereas the lackey does. Our bosses and the sub-bosses might by extra effort get off earlier; so the heads dug into their work as conspicuously as the cash-girls slacked. Stacy seemed to be rooting hardest of the bunch. She had burrowed through a stack of papers cluttering her desk, and was throwing the last sheets out with her hind feet, glancing at her wrist watch now and then, and barking orders short and snappy, when "Ting-a-ling-a-ling!" went the standing 'phone at her elbow, and the hand of Fate lammed her. The lightning struck noiselessly, only a concise message in a gentlemanly voice: "Lady Deering asks me to tell you she will be a few minutes late." Yet the shock nearly shattered Miss Stacy's reputation. It blasted her clear out of her seat; and the thunder began to rumble in about six seconds!

Bain & Dingley prided themselves on selling everything under the sun. You could have bought a dreadnaught there or a dozen of strictly commercial submarines — if you had thought to order them! But one thing they held without money or price — tickets to their own theatre. These were given away; sent out in gold-crested envelopes as thick as blotting paper, and only to the ultra smart customers carrying accounts in four and five figures. The theatre itself was a gem, rigged up in the heart of the new building with a regular drop curtain and sloping floor,

like the best in New York, only that around the orchestra, level with the seats behind and with the boxes in front, ran a wide platform set out with comfy, loafy chairs and tea tables bearing dinky little cards that offered the best tips on sandwiches and pastries and no price mentioned — just the swellest ever.

The entertainments given in this doll's play-house were a special feature of our firm's advertising, and no cheap graft either, the speakers being as high toned as their audiences. Scheduled for that mad October afternoon was the first show of the season — and Miss Stacy had forgotten.

Lady Deering, no end of a swell, had but recently arrived in Manhattan and was being trotted round the ring. Besides holding all the blue ribbons for birth and education, she was a spiritualistic crank, and she had consented to talk " for the sake of the cause "— and Miss Stacy had forgotten!

The aristocrat supported by her grand manner and her several assistants was already on the way, when our Lucy S. realized in an agony that she had not only overlooked the date on the date, but had entirely forgotten to send out any invitations!

I'd have given up then. Gone to the slaughter like a chicken — just lain flop down and stuck my feet in the air to be tied. Wouldn't you?

But our forewoman hadn't reached her position by sloth, either mental or physical. Lady Deering's message was good for twenty minutes; and with everything at command one can do a lot in twenty minutes. Stacy spun round like a mechanical top buzzing directions. She got the tea-kitchen open by turning the idle hour of our restaurant to good ac-

count; started one gang to removing dusters in the theatre, while another arranged decorations commandeered from the florist department, and a third raided the millinery. What for? Wait! We all knew her as a hustler and expected the lightning to dissipate itself zig-zagging in every direction; but the sheer inspiration of her first move had left us gasping.

"Envelope, ma'm?" I was asking for the hundredth time that day, when Sally Wing came running with a tip to report in the costume department and dress up as audience. You bet I didn't make any bones about a customer. That bid wasn't open to everybody, and I've done Sally many a good turn since for bringing it around to me. Three minutes later I was down there among the girls having the time of my life.

The long, wide, quiet aisles, covered with dove-gray carpet, hedged by storerooms on one side and dressing-rooms on the other, which is the lay-out of our costume department, teemed with excited females of all ages — and in all stages. Talk about a dress rehearsal! The undressing took but a jiffy, and then there seemed to be hundreds of us all grabbing things, and laughing and squealing for joy as we buttoned each other up; while the dummies stood by in dignified rebuke like so many perfect ladies. Such a lark hadn't ever happened before to brighten our humdrum lot behind the counters, and it never would again — not during Stacy's term of office — so it was up to us to make the most of it. The dressing bee was fine; but think of sitting for a restful hour in the hallowed circle of those orchestra seats, where only very big

toffs were invited, and having one of the highest highbrows and tallest toffs abandoned to our absorbed gaze for all that time. Why, we'd be able to reckon the buttons on her shoes, let alone her diamonds! We didn't count much on her entertainment as such, but the whole thing was a rare treat without that, and rare things are apt to be fizzy. Men need wines to light them up, but girls can be the bubbly stuff itself when they get going. That costume department effervesced like newly opened champagne for fifteen delirious minutes.

I gave the mob the once over, decided gigglers wouldn't get to the party at all, besides delaying others, and then went straight to a saleswoman and put myself in her hands as if I were a customer. Her practised eye took in my points, and she knew the stock; a jiffy later she had sorted me out the correct size in a dark green broadcloth. Say, it was a peach! I'd never expected to have even the copy of such a model on my humble back. She shooed off some of the herd and gave me my pick of a bunch of hats that had just been brought up; and when she threw me a marabou muff and scarf to complete the toilet, I dove into a dressing room and gloated. I'm not so very tall, but when one's body is in perfect proportion to one's legs, a little slimness goes a long way. And I always did carry my chin high! Little Clarissa had never been dressed right before — not to say real swell — and I hardly recognized the perfectly lovely doll turning slowly before that mirror. But I was keen enough to catch at the first glance her having them both good and plenty — style and the other.

I floated toward the edge of the department, and

began to feel as if I was IT; and just then Miss Stacy came bustling back to round up her audience. She looked at me, hesitated and turned away. That was my cue. The imitation lady sailed up. I meant it as a joke, and thought if I asked to be directed to the lingerie, it would put her wise; but she didn't spot me, and you bet I was game to carry the play-acting through. I knew the way to my own department as well as the way to Buniva's, and it sure was the limit to hear her explaining it all as polite as pie; but of course I couldn't smile much — just that gracious condescension swells bestow on shop people. She bit till you could listen to her teeth click, and at the end of the directions offered me a card, saying:

"Lady Deering, the renowned spiritualist, is lecturing here this afternoon, and I understand she will give some examples of their — their processes. It will be most interesting — would you care to have a ticket?"

Stacy to the dot! Smart as a steel trap, and never missing a chance; and consider where it put me, will you? Hall-marked me right into the top rank.

I took the pasteboard, asking for the time and place as if for news; and along with the ticket came a bright idea. By going down in one elevator, and slipping across and up in another on the far side, I lost our gang. Instead of sitting in rows with the shop girls, I was free to choose a seat, and for one intoxicating hour pass myself off as a social item. So much I planned.

The up-elevator was crowded, and a young fellow, squeezed into a corner, kept on asking anxiously for the theatre. I couldn't hold my curiosity back from peeping, because I knew he must have been invited by

the old dame herself, and she, being such a big bug, all her friends — even the sort that sacrificed a fine day running to hear her lecture — must be real people. The man was taking a look too, at the identical moment; our eyes met and he blushed — that got me. Blushing is scarce in the lower walks of life — folks who have to rustle for a living have too much brass or too little blood. I guess I treated the kid to a smile, because, when he had allowed me to pass out, he walked along close behind, and after I had chosen a place in the theatre, he came and sat down beside me, making us look as if we were together. And that didn't spell finis. He kept on peeking every little while, till I began to get sore and gave him a bit of a cold shoulder, as a swell would do, then he turned lobsterish all over and I felt real sorry for him.

The young man fidgeted, as if I was roasting him on a grill. He doubled under his chair for his hat making to leave — I watching him out of the tail of my eye — and he cocked one eye up at me with a supplicating look. The worst of being an amateur is overdoing things. I saw I'd overdone the snub, so I threw him a smile to make amends, and I guess I overdid that too. For he bobbed up like a cork, and commenced fussing with his overcoat. I was feeling about him as if he was a nursery pet belonging to somebody else, when he staggered me by pulling some papers out of the pocket and handing one over to me, asking if I'd been at Lady Deering's last lecture and if I'd care to have her season's programme? I glimpsed a portrait of the English grandee in all her war paint, and thinking it would be awful fun to have it to show the girls, I put out my hand quick.

my idea. A sort of a too-good-to-be-true look shot the anxiety in his glance. I found out later he was rabid on spirits, feared them, you know, and went in for séances and cold shivers regularly; but at the moment I just caught the shift of his expression as I was moving down the stairs. A tale from Granny's old volume of "Hans Christian Andersen" flashed before me, and I clung to the living memory of a "dog with eyes as big as saucers" while toddling up the aisle. Strange how crazy things like that pop into your mind uninvited, and how much they help. If I'd been thinking hard about what I was doing, I don't believe I'd have had the nerve to carry on.

Their entire outfit must have been afraid I'd get cold feet, because they all hustled to make a fuss over me. Lady Deering herself shook hands, and de Grasse danced around like a hen on a hot griddle. I knew from the minute he helped me on to the platform that he was awful keen. He was the strangest man I ever met. Just having my hands touched casually by his sent a shock and a thrill all over me. I felt a girl oughtn't to like him, and yet I did — he *made* me like him. During the few seconds we talked he reeled off a whole lot of silly stuff about spiritual affinity, that I'm too modest to repeat — anyway there was no sense to it — but I saw I had made a regular hit; and I was mad clear through to think that in less than five minutes the man would have me doing whatever he wanted.

One of those old-fashioned writer fellows claimed women like being seen far better than seeing; but I guess the last is best for a show of this kind. Beyond being introduced to Lady Deering and the rest there

didn't promise to be any fun in it for me. I was set in a chair, and things got duller and duller till I went under — exactly like taking gas in a dentist's shop. From the instant de Grasse faded out I knew nothing, but Griggs told me about it. Griggs is the name of the young gentleman with whom I'd been drinking tea.

I proved a wonderfully easy subject, so de Grasse had me in his hands from the start; and he made me do some terrible fool acts too. Most of the show was over. I was sicking a dog at a rat hole, calling, "Get him, Nibs," slapping my knee, and behaving in general as if I were a ten-year-old cub in pants and a short jacket, and the girls were rocking in their chairs with laughter, while de Grasse stood in the middle of the platform, his arms folded, making me do it. When — Crack! Like the crack of doom, came a hideous, shattering sound, followed by silence. De Grasse and I both crumpled up, and Lady Deering ran whimpering off the platform.

A piercing scream startled the silence and pandemonium broke loose. The whole gang had been feeling creepy over my exhibition and other stunts, and murder on top of it slipped the hounds' leash. The girls from the shop behaved as if they had lost their reason. They yelled and fought to make way. Some yelped like beaten pups, some fainted, others tore their hair. Miss Stacy might as well have talked to the four winds. Customers loitering in the doors, which had unhappily been left open, ran into the store with a dozen mad contradictory reports, electrifying women who were quietly pursuing their own interests at the counters, and sending them wildly

to the scene of horror, crying fatuously could they help, and what was it all about? Every little bit makes a little bit more in Bedlam. Between those pushing to have a look in, and the scared crowd striving to leave, the center hall came dangerously near to being a field of bloody battle.

Griggs sprang over the gallery railing and was by my side in a jiffy. He didn't know at first, he said, whether the shot had been aimed at me or de Grasse. He lifted me looking for a mortal wound, and I opened my eyes. That made him feel different. One of the stage hands helped him get me into a chair, and there I sat, still and white, but gazing calmly at all those raving lunatics. He took my composure for the outward sign of breeding, real people don't act in emergencies like a pack of cats and dogs, and he thought me a pretty plucky girl. But it wasn't self-control, and I don't deserve any praise. When one hasn't been frightened, one stays quiet; and I was far too much occupied to be afraid. I was consciously enjoying the queerest sensations. Some great splendid power seemed to be pouring all through me. It pricked and tingled. I was thrilled as I had been when de Grasse took my hand, only a thousand times more so. My brain glowed inside like an incandescent lamp; my pulses beat double measure without effort; my spirits swam to the lift of the proscenium arch, maybe higher. I might have aspired through a skylight even! I felt I could skip upon a thousand hills. Colts in pasture and boys out of school are as hobbled donkeys compared to the terrific exhilaration of my humanity.

I knew that Clarissa Kendall had just begun to live.

Bah! what most of us call life is merely a hanging on! My whole being was filled with lightness and energy. The medium had been killed — and I was twice alive. I knew swiftly and surely, as later I came to knowledge of many things, that in a mysterious way de Grasse had grabbed me. From this moment I would be in body a beautiful young girl, but in mentality a combination of the sexes — an ambitious woman and a clever man. The stupendous knowledge kept me silent.

Soon, the burning in my brain-pan and the sparks dancing before my eyes merged into form. Did you ever gaze at the sun till your lamps watered and then look away and see only floating splotches of color on light? That was it. The mass molted and floated and came out positive again. At one minute there seemed to be a cat's face watching me, at the next a serpent emerged with two wings spread. It turned from purple to green or red and back again, till I lost the shape of the vision in its confusion of color; and suddenly it flashed black on white and died clean away. For an instant I saw the snake with its twirly tail, as plain as a printed page, then it was gone and my eyes relieved from strain set my other senses free to deafen me with knowledge of the hub-bub all around.

"Let's get out of here," Griggs kept on saying over and over, but he didn't manage to get anywhere on account of those noisy, stampeding girls.

"Are you all right?" he asked for the twentieth time. Others came from the management and asked too, and believing him to be my escort left me to his care.

I was all right, more than fit, feeling magnificent — full of a man's courage veiled in femininity and quickened to deceit. I was certainly on the job, and I learned in a trice that somebody else was on the job also; for my first action flabbergasted Clarissa. She would never have been able to plan so far ahead, and a mere shop girl would never have dared to take the glass of water they brought her and pour it right down the front of Bain & Dingley's gorgeous suit. When I saw myself do so, and scanned the ruin of those borrowed plumes, I thought I must be going dippy, and Griggs thought about the same. I just sat and looked up helpless from the cold thin trickle to his amazed stare; and down again, and away and around — all so sweet and utterly futile and dependent, it appealed to his manhood good and sharp. Anyway, he took the lead like a battering ram and got us out of there.

Seeing the John Bull rampant fairly tickled me, though I've learned since by visiting the right little, tight little island that every Englishman knows how to bully. Griggs hectored the crowd and got his own way all along the line, while I hung on to him — me! that's so shy about getting close to the male sex. However, any fool could see this boy-doll was perfectly safe, and it rounded out the business of my part. The heavier I hung the pinker and fiercer he grew, and in spite of a buzzing head — for there was some excitement, believe me — my muff came in handy as a laughter valve, the hysterical woman in Miss C. K. being unable to squelch completely Henri de Grasse's man-relish of our comical situation. After once catching the hang of the thing I wasn't behind

him in appreciation, for it sure is fun to be the audience and the show too. I was constantly spouting neat little sentences, most unexpected to me, and then patting myself on the back over saying them so well.

For instance, as we neared the Broadway entrance, I heard my own distressed voice murmur:

"Perkins won't be here yet — whatever shall I do?" Say it came out natural! An eavesdropper would have thought I had dozens of servants. I ought to have been scared to introduce a character bang off, just like that, without the ghost of a chance of having him cast; but Perkins got over. Howard Griggs eagerly brushed him aside.

"My man is here — under these unusual circumstances — will you not permit me — entirely at your service —" and more of the same. He certainly knew how to do the courtesy act. "You're — ah, not fit to be alone," served as a clincher.

I was not, if he said so; moreover, I hadn't the slightest intention of being alone. I might have counted the automobile rides I'd had to date on the fingers of one hand, and my slave's soul trembled toward freedom. The temptation of driving up Fifth Avenue at fashion's hour and in fashion's choice regalia put the blinkers on fear. That rumpus we had left upstairs would surely cover a short absence, and if my lark did lead to trouble, it was at least the kind of trouble with the decency to come afterward. I didn't need de Grasse putting it up to me that the game was worth a whole pound of candles.

Foredoomed to push my luck that day, I soon began to realize with joy the acceleration of one man-power behind my feeble pushing.

It was I who sank into the deep cushions of Griggs's hospitality; but it was undoubtedly Henri directing, "Ritz Carlton," and Henri who parted from the stranger at one door of the hotel and then stepped double-quick to a side entrance and took a taxi back to Bain & Dingley's. I'm not a fool. I wasn't quite a two-spot originally, but I wish to give de Grasse all the credit coming to him. I don't want him ever to be a bit peeved on me — heaven only knows what he might contrive to do even now!

I'm ashamed to say Clarissa deserted that taxi in front of the emporium — at times honesty is no policy. I beat it for the costume department, and by shedding my hat and slipping off the green coat, it was possible to steal in among the girls, unrecognized. Hazards, as laid in our gang, being a hollow form of words, were flying thick; the burning question whether the mesmerée had shot de Grasse. Public opinion was dead against her, and you bet I kept mum. I hung the damaged suit where I'd be sure of finding it again, and then went quietly back to my own counter. I was shaking in my shoes on account of the waiting chauffeur, for I didn't know Henri as well as I do now, but he took his diploma on the very first event. Closing time proved him right in guessing that a taxi driver would never spot his whilom elegant fare among the hundreds of girls leaving Bain & Dingley's by an employees' exit.

CHAPTER II

Up to that day I had always thought that I thought. There were evenings when I'd sit with my chin in my hand and if Madame, good soul, asked what was wrong, I'd say, " I'm thinking." But, gee! I'd never done any thinking in my whole life.

For real consecutive thinking one has got to have brains and training. De Grasse had them both. He taught me a whole lot, and I showed him one or two trifles. I made him own that women are marvels at duplicity. " Beauty and brains," he'd say. " Beauty and brains — *both kinds* — we'll beat the world! "

After I got to know Henri I began to like him pretty well. His chief fault was that he wanted to get rich too quick. Of course he lied — who doesn't? And he was a bit shaky on honor; but if you're not in with an honorable crowd — what's the use? I wouldn't do a mean trick on Terry's people for a million straight — Henri's bunch were different.

When we'd arrived at better acquaintance, we didn't have to talk about beauty and brains and such things — we just lived it. And we could act along like one person without a hitch. But at first we had regular debates. I learned life wasn't worth a hill o' beans unless one meet up with Success. And success in the race of life, as in horse racing, depends largely on the getaway. Unless you draw an inside place at the post, you'll have a devil of a run.

Clothes, he said, were the hall-mark of Success, and there wasn't any use entering at all if one didn't wear the right colors. Then I knew why I had poured that glass of water over a perfectly good suit. The accident brought its value within the faint outermost ring of my financial orbit. Next day, I went straight to Miss Stacy and told her about the skirt being spoiled in the panic, laying it on thick when it came to ruin, and offered her so much a week out of my wages. Looked like I was awful honest. The forewoman acted pretty nice over it, and named a low figure. I guess with the police in charge, and Mr. Bain and Mr. Dingley worried to death to hush up a scandal, and scores of reporters being continually shooed off the premises and butting in again, turning up in the guise of customers and salesmen, hanging around the counters buying nothings, with their eyes peeled all the time, and their tongues fairly hanging out to lick up news, Stacy wasn't anxious to hear us elaborate on her faking an audience. So I gained easy leave to take the ruin home, and after operating it on the old ironing-board for the longest Sunday morning on record, its peachy surface came as good as new.

Another matter de Grasse opened his eyes about was reading. Of course I had always glanced through the paper, if it was handy, and kept up with the divorce news, and the society weddings — lots of the brides bought their things from me. Now I took a sheet regular, eleven cents a week, mind you,— but it's nothing venture, nothing win — and I read it from cover to cover with my lamps lit searching opportunity. If it wasn't for bluff, opportunity would be the whole thing in Success — anyway it's mighty important.

Henri conducted my education by making me read aloud the opportunities offering. At first I was taken in by words — it said chances to buy houses cheap, so cheap and so desirable tears fairly sprung to your eyes to think of the loving owners having to part with them at all; and chances to buy businesses; and chances to invest money — but I soon saw that wasn't to the point, me not having any money to invest; besides, I knew Henri was laughing up my sleeve. Finally the worm turned. I threw the paper down, telling him to go seek his old opportunity for himself, and that blooming sheet flopped open right on the society columns where they talk about all sorts of smart happenings — notices that don't figure to be advertisements on the top line, but are so just the same. The first one my eye lighted on was a Charity Bridge to be given at the Ritz in a week. There followed a long list of names and prizes donated by swells: a Chow dog by Mrs. van Buister Clapp, a pianola from Winchley le Peyesent, an automobile by somebody else, an opera box, a vacuum-cleaner and a whole lot more things. It sure did look like a party, if one could have been in the winning class.

Henri vaunted himself over finding that item, and claimed it was the only real opportunity in New York.

"But I don't play bridge," I objected. "I don't know how. And anyway, I never won a prize in my life."

All the same Clarissa was forced to cut the silly piece out and pin it up on her dresser; and the next thing I knew I was borrowing the "A. B. C. of Bridge" from our first-floor front.

"If I deal the cards," Henri argued, "you won't

need to do much playing. And besides, you want to go. You've bartered your liberty for a fine new suit — now what is the use of a becoming costume and no place to wear it?"

De Grasse had always been foxy with the women; it's no wonder he egged me on till I filled up with the spirit of the gamble and grew keener than a March wind.

Once started I was just as good as Henri in the money spending line. On Saturday afternoon I travelled up to the Vacation Savings' office and drew out all my capital. They tried hard to make girlie leave some — "Just a nest egg." But my second wouldn't stand for half measures. He said he was going to put our money where it would draw interest or bust; and not to be a little Sally-sucker, and a diffident dub. I always had thought it right cute of them to handle working girls' accumulated ready and not pay over any of the unearned increment. However, I'm grateful to them for making me save, because it ended in a perfectly splendid three hours buying a hat, and gloves, and shoes, and a fixing for my neck. I wanted to corral the ticket also, but Henri postponed that purchase till the last minute, explaining if I walked in and presented a pass, they'd wonder why I was not with my own party; and it was always best in such cases to attract as little attention as possible.

On Tuesday I'd have gone to the shop like an honest simp, and asked for the afternoon off — and perhaps not got it. Henri pointed out the safe way was to lie in bed and makes excuses later, so I loafed, but I didn't sleep after six; didn't want to for that

matter — lying awake and thinking about not having to get up was such a treat! My old alarmy showed three hours past before Buniva came up hunting trouble. Board is board seven days in the week and Herself never countenanced any trifling with the almighty dollar. If every last one of her family didn't materialize for breakfast, business instincts drove her aloft. She was a jolly, helpful soul aside from tariff, and hearing of the party she promised to give me lunch and let it stand on the bill instead of breakfast — a clear saving to me of fifteen cents.

Time, they say, was made for slaves, but the less folks accomplish the faster it goes. My idle hours simply whirred. I could hear them pass. I didn't do a thing but manicure myself from top to toe, so as to be worthy of the new duds; and fuss up the little trimmings on my waist; and try my hair in a dozen ways till I struck the sympathetic note for hat and face. My hair certainly is grand — the color of a squirrel's back in the sun, as one of Terry's poetic friends told me. I punctured his metaphor at the time by asking if he meant a gray squirrel, and he ran on flat tires all the rest of the evening; but it wasn't a bad description. Every hair is long, mere man won't be able to fathom the value of that remark; it lies smooth, you know, and holds a marcel for a week; and I haven't too much, which is almost as awkward as none, but just the right amount to make sure of following any mode.

Henri held appearances didn't matter in this outing as they would all be women. Then I knew I'd be obliged to order a primer or graft femininity on to the roots of his ignorance like a tea rose. The why-for

of gorgeous apparel is the mental effect on oneself. That brand of courage needed to face patronesses and head waiters rises higher as the rising tide of dollars surges over one's person. Flowing lines make for egotism and a train is a great moral support. Take it from your Uncle Dudley, the hats of history have carried through more mischief than the heads beneath them. I knew this affair would be every woman for herself, and the devil take the dowdiest, so I spread myself on a toilet, and when a hotel mirror had assured me that my skirt hung even and my stockings hadn't ripped at the heel, I felt as if the Queen of Sheba were my orphant niece, and I issued out and ordered a taxi in my most regal manner. We put up the price to drive from the Manhattan, because de Grasse maintains arriving on foot is bound to take the starch out of any enterprise. On wheels you may be anybody, but pedestrianism sure is low down or hard up.

The boy jumped so quick to the door I wondered if he could have remembered me arriving in Griggs's car; but when I saw the crowd, I got him. There were all kinds present, and some of them pretty plain dressers. I guess they took their fill of high life when the price of getting in and out again was only three dollars. I looked a swell. Money talks, even my little savings' book full. Everything I had on the outside was brand new à la the millionaire. I'd always fancied it must be uncomfortable and you're right, it was. New stays, high heels and a brimless hat — the Inquisition wasn't in class, and the self-consciousness of it kept me from giving my whole mind to what was going forward. Launched alone

in those gigantic rooms amid a thousand she peacocks I felt like a chip going over Niagara, and I had to fall back on Henri. That's where he got the upper hand. Every time we maneuvered on new ground I fell back, and soon he was doing all the ordering. It was next door to matrimony, only more fun, because no one understood about my better half. A real fine looking girl is a peril and the boys don't forget it. Of course there's always a sucker or two hanging about the married dames, happy to bask in the grateful certainty they can't tar them with father's blessing and feather them with wedding plans at the first act of indiscretion; but, thank God, the bulk of males are men, and any fellow worth his salt still yearns toward danger — especially when it's unescorted.

Incapable of counting a pip that afternoon I leaned hard on de Grasse, and he certainly did rise to the occasion; between my partner and me holding all the cards once in four, and fair hands other times, we ate them up. I hadn't set my heart on a prize, however, and when they called my name and handed out the opera box, I'm afraid little Clarissa attracted bushels of attention. It made Henri mad. Always disapproving of publicity he hustled me into a taxi and home, saying it was only a beginning anyway and no time to crow.

CHAPTER III

De Grasse and I had a fight that evening because I refused to hand everything over to him holus-bolus. One of those opera invitations was destined for Howard Griggs. I wasn't in love with the boy, mind you, in spite of hanging on to him in the shop, but I thought it would be a lark to see him again; and having made up my mind I didn't intend to be dominated. Besides — who else was there to ask?

It's a sure thing if any friendly philanthropist had chucked me a bunch of opera tickets before I got mixed up with Henri, I'd have cut for Buniva's, had a glorification with the family, and then rigged little old Madame up in her best togs and carried her off to hear "Caroose." But the party wasn't pleasure now. It had to be considered as a business opportunity. Ambition is the most devastating kill-joy known!

Instead of making merry I went straight and shut myself in my room to figure the thing out. I was terribly scared de Grasse would insist on selling the box — for I did want to see the show — and I determined to render that scheme impossible without loss of time. I'd swiped a piece of paper and an envelope from the Ritz, so, when I finished composing a note, a few brief noncommittal lines, I stuck the ticket in and mailed it quick. Henri had noticed the club address and said in an offhand way, we might as well keep on the youngster's track. He had no ob-

jections to Griggs. But he thought he could run our campaign best, and he was sore at me for acting on my own. After that he sunk himself deep in the sulks and refused all communication.

Two entire days those swell bits of card lay in my room untouched, except for the way I fingered them while I was trying to think. I'd sort them out in a row on the bed and gloat; and then rearrange them and sit gazing — but I failed to hit upon a classy plan. Memory kept hopping and skipping from one silly detail to another: the clothes some of the women had worn, and how the old chap looked when he gave me the prize, and what they said at the shop next morning. My mind showed about as much concentration as a frayed rope end.

By-and-by I grew nervous over missing an opportunity we didn't even have to go after, but which snuggled all ready and waiting in the top bureau drawer. Time passed, and it was a rank shame. I gave in and apologized. I guess women are most sensible about these affairs; Henri ought to have done the humility act if he hadn't been too stiff necked — he was anxious to make up all right. He had been thinking the situation out, in his wounded seclusion, and was ready to get to work with a plan cut and dried — I had only to follow directions.

The passports were delivered in a big thick white envelope, regular wedding stationery, tied with ribbon. I had laid the last away to use in a chemise, but now we dug them both out, and sealed and tied our treasures, still innocent of address; and then, putting on my oldest clothes I sallied forth. Rain smirched the darkness into inkier black, and it was cold. How-

ever, my heart throbbed to adventure, and I was relieved over making up with Henri. The past forty-eight hours had been worse than an attack of indigestion. I decided never to quarrel with him again — happen what might. Standing there waiting for an up-town car we sealed our bargain; and the very gutters purling at my feet seemed to lilt a jollier note.

I was bound for the club district. Henri maintained that having decent clothes the next item on the list for me was some stylish acquaintances. He felt sure I only needed to meet folks; and intended introducing me, in his own fashion, to the right people — the opera-box kind. Little by little one learns the resourcefulness of a confidence man — that was a name people called Henri when they didn't like him — and it was a splendid name! After the outcome of this event, which was far reaching as you'll see, he had gained my entire confidence.

There was no use picking out Griggs's club, or any of the smaller, exclusive places, because the men belonging to them had boxes of their own; and the university clubs are apt to harbor honest, poor chaps. So we decided on the Engineers' as our likeliest gamble; and I alighted at Fortieth Street, and plodded through the drizzle to that colossal pile. The neighborhood proved quite deserted. A glance to right and left assured me of safety for the moment, and, quick as a dart, I made the toss — we had cast our bread upon the water. I stole across to the opposite side to watch for signs of an immediate return, for I've always been a believer in proverbs. The envelope looked so large and white glaring up from the club porch, I was afraid it might attract too much curiosity,

and that one of the attendants would come out and nab it.

Back and forth I walked, and up and down, and nothing happened. The night was sodden, void, companionless. For change I leaned against the library fence, or shifted from one foot to another. Then I'd begin to tramp once more. Weariness and cold crept over me like a snail, and Henri came in for some pretty hot invective, not at all in the spirit of our late compact. As I turned for the hundredth time, a taxi whizzed around the Fifth Avenue corner, and my heart nearly stopped — but it didn't affect my feet. I was down at the far end of the block when those lamps blazed on the watery road, and I fairly flew to the scene of action, crept close, out of range, and stood stark, hidden by the gloom and my umbrella.

Two men came from the club. A small, jovial, sing-songy fellow, in no condition for acute observation, nearly fell over our bait without taking it, but his friend shoved him away and reached for the package. He was a dandy, square shouldered man, wearing a light colored, shaggy cloth coat, and looking very much as a man ought to look. I beamed in the security of my cotton shelter, while they peered this way and that, seeking a possible owner. Nix on finding Clarissa. So I watched Mr. Big-Man open the envelope, glance at the tickets, and pocket the lot. Then I beat it for home. I'll bet you I was the most excited and expectant girl in Greater New York that hour; and I must confess, just a pin-prick sorry I had invited Griggs.

The box was for Saturday matinée and I stayed home from the shop again, there not being time to

opera. It was real comfortable, me not being obliged to put on side as I'd only won the box at cards. Wise guy! He had armed himself with a book where every word of the play was written in two languages; and it turned out the keg she'd had her foot on was full of gold.

"That's the best ever!" I exclaimed. "When she ranted away like that, I took her for a suffragette or a temperance fiend!"

We all laughed, and I saw his nice blue eyes twinkling. People looked our way — his roar sounded so big and jolly.

"I'll bet they haven't as much gold in that keg now as I have in my pocket," he said. And I was trying to square him as a boastful ass, when he pulled out a great hunk of metal that made my eyes pop.

"Did you ever see how it grows? That's a nugget from the Dome mine."

Henri positively quivered with eagerness to touch the glittering thing. (Him pick on me for excitement!) I sat turning the blob over and over, trying to back my second-self into place, while I threw out amazingly ignorant questions about the why and wherefore. Ross — that was the big man's name — seeing me interested, talked a lot, and I suppose one would say he talked well. Almost any man can spiel you glibly on his own business; but a good listener is a gift of God. Henri and I sat there with our ears flapping, and I guess the engineer enjoyed himself. We learned how La Rose, a French Canadian, had picked up a lump of silver from the surface of the rocks away out in some forsaken woods; and had rustled right in and staked all the land coming to him,

before he made anybody wise to his find. Of course he had the best patch in the vicinity, being Johnny on the spot. A few big bugs had jumped in second and snatched the ripe plums; and all sorts of get-rich-quick quacks had been trooping up and drawing surprise packages out of the Canadian wilds ever since. Seedy engineers overran the ground like a plague of locust, he said, but quite recently a new gold camp had been opened to the north, with blare of trumpets, and a lot of the driftwood was sweeping on. Ross himself had stuck to silver, believing there were still plenty of elegant veins to run down in the Cobalt region.

When I heard that old La Rose had scratched rock and grubbed around for more than twenty years before he saw the "bloom," I thought it knocked a large chunk of icing off the cake. But Henri continued to be in a ferment over the whole story. He would have taken French leave then and there, so as not to miss a minute of the big gamble, only he wanted to chum up with Ross some more. I felt he yearned toward him like a brother in prosperity, and perhaps that made me more approachable than usual. As I've told you, I believe in keeping fellows at arm's length; but Ross was a great Newfoundland dog sort of man, and one doesn't mind petting a real friendly, nice dog. What with this "good old fellow" attitude, and Henri's sudden leaning, first thing I knew the engineer had pulled his chair closer, and we were talking almost in whispers, so that my other guest excused himself and went out for a smoke.

Ross didn't snatch the opportunity to ladle out any soft soap though, he kept right on telling me about mines,— how they dig a shaft in the ground and lay

out galleries from that; and how they bore a hole for the explosive, and stick it in, and then all hike immediate, so as not to run any risk of being blown up; and about hoisting the broken rock in buckets, and having to put it through machines before it can be sold, and what a lot of money it takes to operate a claim after you secure it.

Ross owned a good looking lot I gathered, but not much of the ready.

He said if you saw a bit of likely ground that you wanted, and nobody else held, you just hammered in stakes at certain distances, and then went around and registered the claim; and if you did it all according to Canadian law, not forgetting anything, nobody on earth could take it from you. But if you had a real mine, and you had left any tiniest mite of a loophole, not according to regulations, woe betide you. Some smart-aleck would up and find a fault in your title, and then the ground must be thrown as wide open to everybody as it was in the beginning. Only that the entire camp knew by then what the ore assayed, and the fellows would sit up nights waiting till your hold on it was busted, and they'd dash out and race you to it, and maybe beat you, and stake your ground in their own name, and steal your fortune altogether. That doesn't seem fair to me, but it's the way they play the mining game.

I was so thrilled hearing about the real thing I forgot we were at the opera, until the lights dipped and the top gallery began to sish for silence.

Ross sat back, and I couldn't get a word more out of him, only once he patted my hand where it lay on the nugget, whispering,

"Will you keep it to remember me by?"

We were swimming along. Buckwater — the other man — went out in the second interval to have another smoke, and I was trembling, and enjoying and wondering about it, sure Ross would try and see me again, and determined to give him my correct address — since he was going out of town, when the door opened, and who should appear but Griggs, quite breathless and very pink! Gee! I hated him! But I had to get up and do the polite, and perhaps in my excitement I rather overdid it. My Gold Man drew right into himself.

Of course I introduced everybody. The engineers took Griggs for a legitimate friend, and I guess they thought I was rattled because I didn't want to be caught entertaining strangers. Both men spotted it, and not a word said about losing tickets. Griggs on his side was cold surprised not to find a chaperone; and he didn't cotton to the engineers any more than they did to him.

First thing Howard plucked out his nifty pocketbook and showed me a clipping about the de Grasse murder. Having read millions of words on the subject I would just as soon he had left this news item at home. But at least it was news. Detective Buttle by adding two and two made thirteen. The medium, he claimed, was head of a big gang the police had been after for years; and the fact of a woman shooting him (which looked likely there having been a hundred women present to one man) opened up a long avenue of clues. They were about to round up every known female crook, and make them show their whereabouts on the memorable date.

Henri grew so interested in this phase of his own murder, I was forced out of general conversation, and had to read the cutting line by line. He wouldn't let up even when the performance started, and I finished with the assistance of Griggs's programme lamp. Glancing from the paper to the darkened dome above us I saw again that symbol of the winged snake. The creature flashed upon me bright and clear and I marked every detail: the small evil head, those strange hieroglyphics on its spread wings, which had once borne resemblance to a cat's eyes, and the perfect circle backing all. I could never mistake or forget the form though I didn't choose to see it. His wiggly tail filled me with the creeps, and a horrible fear sprang out in the darkness turning me icy cold. De Grasse must have wished the D. T.'s on me!

There aren't but three acts to that opera, so when the bowing and the clapping subsided we had to leave. Griggs suggested tea, and there were no bids against him. The strangers, thinking we belonged while they were mere outsiders, beat a retreat.

Griggs spouted a little about "Destinn being in voice," and "Puccini's music not expressing the spirit of our west, nor quite revealing the farther occidentalism of Japan," — he was a regular bug on opera — and then we shook hands all around.

The yellow car didn't look half so big, or half so yellow, or half so luxurious as it had before; but the youth himself was nicer. He would have called at the hotel next day, he said, if he had known my name. I ought to have told him "Sapphira"— but of course I'd signed Kendall on the note, and he knew now and could easily figure that no unattached female

was registered under K at the Ritz. I cast about for plausible whopper number two (Henri has got me in all wrong with the recording angel) and suddenly decided I had been out of town for a couple of weeks and was going away again. But right there I got a tip that lack of an address and a chaperone were going to stall me with Griggs. You see Howard was a dyed-in-the-wool aristocrat; if he hadn't been a bit of a stranger in New York society himself, he would have known who owned that opera box, and then — good night Clarissa.

CHAPTER IV

Well, it was all over with the goose, but I still had the golden egg. Henri grew hourly more determined on a visit to Cobalt. Silver, he said, was about the likeliest opportunity for us; and this new gold field to the north might prove a bonanza. If it had not been for my sex, he'd have floated an entire company on that one nugget alone. "Get your stock on the market first," he preached. "You can buy a hole in the ground easily enough when the directors ask for it." De Grasse always put the cart before the horse, to my way of thinking, but I was learning to appreciate him, and to lie low; and he began to figure out it wasn't all jam being a woman. Nobody takes us seriously, and aside from marriage speculative enterprise is practically closed against us.

My skirts put the kibosh on Henri's operating in New York; but I knew he'd never be satisfied till he had a finger in the mining pie, so gradually I made our preparations. My extra duds, not many, some cheap jewelry, Aunt Elizabeth's ear-rings and my stock of pictures and books all found their way to Second Avenue. There was a little Vacation Savings' money left; but I'd been fined at the shop, besides having to pay regularly on my nifty suit; and we couldn't tote the fare up anyway. Henri insisted on keeping the nugget.

The only scheme we hit on was for me to work

extra time, and there we took Madame Buniva into counsel. Madame had a square head under that bob of hair she sported, and she had a right good heart too. One of her brothers ran a catering establishment, and she packed me off to him with a glowing recommendation. After he read it, I thought he was going to embrace me, but it was just the man's Italian way. He trotted off to call his Señora, and the two of them began talking with their hands and gurgling. I couldn't make head nor tale of it till Mrs. Sturani produced a frilly cap and apron and dressed me up. The black and white trimmings made me look out of sight. Then the boss spoke English long enough to promise me a job taking hats and coats at a big thé dansant Saturday afternoon. I failed to get wise to the address, because I had to report at the shop and go over with a bunch of help — waiters and dishes and pastry altogether. We managed to be pretty gay in the wagon and I forgot to keep tab on the blocks.

It was a tall house with big iron gates and looked much like other houses outside, but a wing extending back behind their next door neighbour made it a regular mansion for accommodation. I thought the whole lay-out too ornate — beamed ceilings, and gold leaf, and mirrors, hotel style, and gold furniture with red plush seats. Presently the Missus showed up. Her outline looked like a figure 8 tipsy drunk, and she wore the highest heels I've ever seen. But she wasn't a bit the grand dame with us — no, sir-ee! She knew what was what in the kitchen. Why, the way she laid it down to Sturani you'd have thought she'd been a cook all her life.

though everything was ready for proceedings as soon as I got out of the way.

With attention riveted on the table, for glass is glass and I didn't hanker after any juggling stunts just then, I leaned over to set the tray in safety, but my eye lit on the wax securing their papers, and I almost dropped the lot — for they were sealed with the sign of the winged snake; Henri's delirium tremens, wiggly tail and all, modelled there in official red, clear and perfect.

A gasp escaped me while I was chasing my breath, and one of the men remarked:

"Pretty big lift for a little girl."

"That'll do," said the boss, jerking his head towards the door, and I was obliged to quit. But I only dodged out of sight, not out of hearing, they had to reckon with de Grasse. Ever since Henri fluxed his soul into mine, this snake thing had been blotching itself on my eyeballs, and I had been racking an overstimulated brain to find out its meaning. That it had been and perhaps still was of immense importance to him seemed sure, but how — why — where? Seeing the spittin' image of the beast on Jacob's table didn't do a thing to my curiosity. I was crazy to read those papers and find out about the seal, and I'd have taken any risk rather than lose the chance, so I opened the door and then gave it a smart push as I popped back behind the curtains. The decided bang following closed me in instead of out. I stood crouched against the wall, hardly breathing with my heart whacking like a typewriter and my eyes glued to the crack.

The four men were gathered close around the table

I was crazy to read *those papers* and find out about the seal

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under the rays of a powerful light; no stage setting ever offered a better opportunity to see; but they fell at once into a sort of voice cipher, speaking in low, monotonous tones and I heard little.

"That door wasn't closed last time," murmured a fidgety fellow almost in my ear as he tried it. Gee! I was stiff with fright. All my functions stood still till he got back to his seat and settled himself.

They inspected various papers and O. K.'d them. They all had a drink again, and finally the boss drew that little black wallet towards him. My suspense fairly tingled.

Deliberately the leader removed an elastic band from the pocketbook, and opened its two flaps. And he dumped out — a mess of powders. Just ordinary pieces of folded white paper — I was never so let down in my life!

All the doctors, for they must have been doctors, I reckoned — the purse-proud sort that fatten out of dying millionaires — sat regarding the medicine-pile fixedly for several seconds. Then the long-nosed man opened one, shook its contents together, let it lie exposed for them all to see, and did it up nicely and neatly again. He opened every single powder, and all the time I had to stand waiting, I couldn't even see whether it was pink pills or stuff like salts, and I began to feel awfully weary, and wondered how Joe was making out at the door, and figured my chances of getting away alive.

When they had thoroughly inspected the contents, they counted those blessed powders once more, and Mr. Horse-Face swept them off the end of the table into the wallet with a comprehensive movement of his

long wrist. The boss stood. They were through. One of the guests raised his glass, tasted the drink, smacked his lips, and said, "Good liquor."

"We'll have in some ice when de Sola's finished," answered the host, as the papers were bunched together. "Can't be too careful — don't know whose about — house is in such a damned muddle to-day."

"Deuced pretty little girl brought the last — where do you find 'em, Jacobs?" The speaker sounded relaxed. I could hear them well enough when they used a natural voice, and I saw him stretch into comfort. But you bet I didn't. Something was going to happen, fast. I had my eyes peeled, watching.

The boss had crossed to the back of the room, beside the fireplace. He stepped behind a big chair and reached up fingering the woodwork. His dark clothes merged into the shadows of the black wall, only spots of white could be distinguished, a strip of collar, and his hands, and the bald spot on his head showing like a bull's-eye.

Nobody paid any attention to his stunt. They were all talking and joking most congenial. But I'd hardly said, "Empty loft," to myself, when an oblong panel in the wainscot sprang open.— You could have knocked me over with a feather! Of course I'd played at castles with moving walls and hidden chambers while I was a kid — what youngster doesn't? — but when I became a hard-headed young business woman I put away kiddish things. And now to find them coming true in life!

Well, this one was fact. The big man switched on a side lamp and I saw, with my own eyes, a deep niche where the ends of similar wallets showed neatly stacked

— there must have been a dozen of them. While we watched, it seemed that Henri was trying to tell me something. To make me do, or think quick, or understand — and it didn't come off. I knew there were plenty of communications from him that I failed to grasp — but this one must be awfully important, and I laid my soul open to get it. Whatever was in those wallets? Whatever could be in a powder of that size valuable enough, or dangerous enough to hide away? Patent explosives? Too small. A secret treasure in a doctor's house — it must be a drug — Opium! Ah! I had never seen opium — but, of course, Henri would be on. And the stuff was worth tanks of money.

They had rung for ice, and I felt that this was my grand opportunity to slip out; but I felt sure, too, that de Grasse was going to stay right there and take a chance on opening that cupboard later. And I wished we had noticed the movement of the boss's fingers more particularly, for he just shoved the door close and left it — a section of the lacquered wall, so very similar to other sections, beautiful and innocent with rows of carving along the top and in between.

At last Jacobs heaved himself out of his chair and said, "Rebecca'd be sore if they didn't show up."

He poured them a doch-an-doris for luck, and at that my knees began to shake literally till I feared the trembling would sure discover me. Was it going to be possible for an eavesdropping maid to flatten herself and escape detection? I had moved back from the chink of observation and could see nothing in the heavy shadow, but whisky and perfume strongly blended assailed my protesting nose and I knew they

approached. If they crowded into the shallow alcove at the door — if any of them shoved against me — I was lost! But they moved like thoroughbreds upon the order of their going, while I did the pancake act and prayed. Their fat hands swayed the curtains, one by one their sleek black heads bobbed between the edges of my velvet screen and disappeared. I relaxed and dropped into the nearest seat.

A number of people happened to arrive just then, and a magpie chattering greeted the host. I noticed with satisfaction that Joe would not have time to search for me, and I was reasonably safe from intruding guests as the room lay out of the way; but, of course, I dared not close myself in lest Jacobs return. To arrange the curtains with closed edges remained my only security, and a precious slim one. Still, risk it I must. Softly I stole across the room and carefully and minutely examined the panels covering their treasure. The secret was well hidden. I climbed upon a chair bringing my eyes nearer to the field, though realizing the position doomed me in case of interruption. Being a novice in the detective job kept me horribly uneasy. For a time my eyes and fingers joined frantically in the search, but the lamp throwing its bright rays on my illegal actions strung my nerves so skittishly I switched it off. Luck must serve for or against me anyway — I might as well feel for the blooming springs in the safety of darkness. Feel for them I did, madly, nimbly, frisking my fingers over the fine carved mouldings — but without result. Time flew, at any instant I was likely to be frightened off, prevented. I'd never be in the house again — never have another chance.

"Now, now, now! I've got to see it now!" I cried, in my excitement forgetting caution and banging my fists on the offending wall. A low whirring answered. I had started something sure! Burglar alarms? Was I trapped?

Fear impelled me to my old hiding place, sense told me to beat it, and perhaps be able to dodge out; but something, Henri perhaps, petrified me to the spot. I knew I had to see that panel open, and if it was the springs I'd struck — maybe it had buzzed for Jacobs and I hadn't been able to hear it on the other side of the room. I switched on the light and glued my eyes to the wall directly in front of me. Quivering like an aspen and listening with the pores of my skin, I waited. A matter of seconds it was, but being so concentrated on the wrong idea I missed the real thing.

A voice spoke close beside me and I jumped clean into the air, whirling face about.

The sound had not come from behind me and no one was in the library. I saw that, while I was so intently watching for the little door to pop open, a whole lower panel of the side wall had slid back leaving me opposite the entrance into another room — or closet. The voice came from there.

It was a small corner not offering much comfort, as comfort went in Jacobs's house. By a table sat a gaunt figure wrapped in a worn gray dressing-gown. Her hair was gray, her very flesh seemed gray, and most uncanny of all her eyes were bandaged.

"I see him. I see him," she mumbled. "I see him all the time."

And immediately, as though answering her, de

Grasse told me. "She did it — I might have known she'd get me," hatred and admiration mingled in his words. His stab at my understanding was subconscious of course, yet it was as clear as if you were asking for sugar in your morning coffee.

From the first I felt a strong familiarity with this old woman. She repulsed me, and in spite of that I understood a great wrong was being or had been done her; not a tragic but a comic wrong, and I commenced by tolerating her with a sort of humorous pity. I felt a bit as if one had put up a huge practical joke and the joke had stalemated — which was odd, considering what Henri had just told me.

Aside from the horrible surprise of meeting her, and my strange position I was scared of her too. Scared as a shaver is scared when he is going to be whipped. Henri didn't seem to have any of the dignity of the murdered. He was scared of her authority.

My brain was running like a trip-hammer, setting up question marks all along the line. My first curiosity about the winged snake, Henri's confidential connection with the wealthy Jacobs's secret paled into insignificance before the fact that Jacobs was protecting Henri's murderer. Here was I face to face with a perfect stranger, a woman three times my age, down on her luck and suffering from a physical handicap; not at all the class or type to have intrigued de Grasse. He recognized her as his murderer and yet he didn't pitch into her. Instead he trembled toward her as a puppy to its master, a cub toward a stern guardian. I twigged at once that whatever the old dame had done to Henri, Henri had jolly well deserved it.

Torn between guilt and a hang-dog desire to help her I moved cautiously forward. De Grasse hadn't made clear to me what his intention was — and I never knew. Very often I acted on impulse — his impulse — and discovered the motive to myself after the fact. Now I was moving vaguely, and as quiet as a mouse, but the blind have quick ears. She heard me and turned.

"Is that you, Samuel? What news?"

Her masterful tone sent an electric thrill down my spine. I had thought it a case of a kind word to a poor blind thing, blind and easy to circumvent. She made me realize I was the one most likely to need help and I turned to quit. Then what I saw made my blood freeze. The panel was closing! Quietly, swiftly, surely moving into place, operated by a time lock.

With one stifled scream I leaped for the gap. The prisoner echoed my yell in a panic of fear and grabbed the lace of my apron. I pulled to wrench the stuff from her hold. She held on like a vice. I tore at the strings to get the thing off — I was thumbs — thumbs — thumbs!

Only for a moment her nerves had the better of her; as soon as she recognized the feel of the mousselin she cried out sharply, "A woman!" and raised her hand to the bandages.

The echo of her first words rushed over me. I sensed foul play, that her eyes were covered to keep out the vision of Henri's corpse — whatever her mad whim, she must not see me, must not have a tag on me for the rest of life. In a frenzy of terror I struck at her, and she sank into the chair, whimpering, moan-

ing. As I sprang through the wall to safety she cried aloud and I turned and looked.

She had torn the bandage down, and above it her live eyes glared viciously — not blind, not even cowed, but full of hate. So we regarded each other, I in stupefication, a new sense of familiarity dawning on me, and she mad to the bone. It was a terrible minute while the treacherous panel glided between us and closed. The whirring of its machinery stopped. I cast myself on the floor and sobbed with the muffler cut out.

From sobbing I went into a sort of swoon, and I don't know how much of the afternoon passed before sounds aroused me — footfalls. My breath still came with a catch that I couldn't control. The steps hesitated, and began to approach again stealthily. They came right on to the big chair. I wondered if it was somebody else after the secret. I bit my lips to keep back the little sighing sniffs.

Springs creaked. Evidently the intruder had seated himself. Doubtless I was caged by a harmless guest stealing off for a quiet smoke; whatever would he think, what could he think if he found one of the maids in a heap on the floor with those decanters so suggestively near?

It was clearly up to me to assert my dignity — the first thing to get on my feet, without detection, if possible. Cautiously I raised my head and looked up — straight into the face of Howard Griggs who was peering over the chair back.

I sprang to my feet. The maid's dress, my ambiguous position, pulling the social wool over his eyes and all such nonsense fled before the need of help. Relief,

joy — sheer, radiant joy at seeing a safe person instead of the dubious stranger I expected, rushed pell-mell over me; and I in turn overwhelmed poor Griggs. My black and white garb and scared face looked spooky, and he was a believer in manifestations.

He sat back on his heels, gazing dumfounded till I gave one of those laggard, rasping sobs.

"Jove! You!" he gasped. "I thought it was a dog — I'm fond of dogs."

"And I took you for a cat — you walked cattish." We laughed — the high spasmodic cackle of excitement, and in the middle of it I slapped my hand over his mouth. "Hist!"

My gentleman turned purple; but I commenced to talk quick, standing close and speaking into his ear.

"Listen! Who are these people? What is wrong with this house?"

In one embarrassed breath he told me he didn't know the people, hadn't even the honor of their name, had arrived by mistake and stayed out of inability to break away.

"I was invited to some other bally place — streets all sixes and sevens — what do you expect? They bagged me here because I met a girl upstairs whom I did know."

I brushed the missing link aside. "This house is queer — it's wrong. But of course if you don't know them —" Answering his incredulous stare I hissed, "I've just seen the woman who murdered de Grasse."

"Thundering stars! What are you doing here in these clothes?" he asked suddenly. "Are you nutty?"

"Never mind the clothes — I'll explain some day.

Concentrate on the idea that I've got to get away quick. She saw me, and she'll tell. She'll not lose time telling. They'll trap me. They are dangerous, evil people. They've got opium hidden — I saw it. The walls open. It's an awful den!

"Howard Griggs," I cried, taking him by the shoulders. "Wake up! Get out of that chair. Help me, help me! I tell you I've got to escape."

"Jove, yes!" He blinked several times in rapid succession, fumbling for his eyeglass. "I'll fetch a cloak — you can't go about that way — and I'll call a car." He was gone.

I sneaked behind the portières and waited, but not for long. Griggs's dispatch amazed me. I reckon he must have done the John-Bullying act again good and lively; but as a matter of fact he only sauntered up, asked for Miss Swanhill's coat, screwed his monocle into place, intimidated Joe by a cold scrutiny and sent him on an errand. Then I walked out wrapped in velvet to my feet; and at the curb he put me into a private brougham. So long as he stayed inside the social paddock, Howard took his high jumps as well as anybody I ever saw — but he was no range mustang.

"Drive Miss Kendall home, and return — Miss Swanhill is leaving late," he ordered. And to me, "The Waldorf?"

My own address signified nothing to a stranger. Griggs repeated it to the wondering man, with utmost aplomb, and leaned pinkly through the open window.

"I'm going up to dance with my lady now — keep her occupied, you know — and — I hate her! Don't worry, the feeling isn't mutual — you will have plenty of time. See you to-morrow."

I squeezed his hand, flashing my thanks, wordless; and a moment later, all in a swither, I was speeding towards Madame Buniva's.

Swither is one of Granny's Scotch expressions. It exactly describes the state of my mind and pulse when that ride began. After a while I felt quieter and glanced about, taking in every detail of the swell little automobile. Griggs's friend evidently enjoyed most of the good things of this world. All sorts of dodgy conveniences were fitted into its pearl gray upholstery, among others a case filled with women's implements in gold and crystal. I pounced on the salts bottle. Gee! it was strong stuff — but it helped! A sneeze or two set my machinery working O. K.

Our elegant seclusion afforded Henri five minutes to gather his bearings and think. Memory seized on one circumstance after another; and dropped this, and picked up that, and brought them all forward like a ride-and-tie race, eventually arriving at the conclusion we hadn't much chance if Samuel Jacobs got wise to our whereabouts. We could trust Griggs, he being a gentleman, more keenly interested than ever, and not likely to split. The chauffeur was another matter. Still pondering I sniffed a bracing whifter, and the dinky bottle in my hand gave de Grasse an idea — a revolutionary, deck-sweeping inspiration — but we must first put them off the scent. Having thrown them the clue of my correct address this promised difficulty, for the driver was not likely to forget such an unusual locality, and I had no tip to pledge his silence. Twice already he had stopped to ask if it was right, and kept on, frankly under protest, into what he considered the slums.

Fortunately, when we arrived, it was meal-time and few of my neighbors were hanging around outside. I had removed my apron and slipped the bottle down my stocking. Now I let him see me shed the handsome cloak and put it back in the car.

"You have brought me too far," I said. "But I am much obliged all the same."

Then I turned deliberately away from Madame's and walked to the third door. It was an odd, flat building in a row of mansard-roofs — a bum boarding-house where persons flitted over night — I was certain he would remember it. As I paused to ring, I could see the man staring, but only for a minute. He shot away before the door opened, and I beat it down those stairs and into Buniva's straight up to my own room, thanking my lucky stars that such a stylish arrival had not created more excitement.

I sat on the bed panting. We were sure in wrong, and Henri said it was best to quit cold. "Everything is a beginning." Tish! I'd come near making an end of that old woman and wasn't ambitious to stay in the town with her hunting me. I might have put the chauffeur off the track, but it would be a cinch to trace the maid — and I had driven the final nail into my coffin with a gold-topped bottle. I'd have both search parties on the rampage unless Griggs squared me.

Packing proved simple. My old clothes had been left at the caterer's. I dressed in my best, put a few articles in Granny's bag, laid the nugget, the bottle and my purse, with all our ready money, on top, and sallied forth. But first I wrote a note to Buniva.

"Dear Madame:

"I'm stony, and going away to take a better job. Please don't say anything to anybody. I won't forget the two weeks' board.

"Hastily,

"CLARISSA KENDALL.

"P.S. Sturani's uniform is in the bureau drawer.

"C. K."

No dinner for me that evening — and not a moment to spare. I had to pay a visit to my uncle. I chose a different place this time, better class, as I was better dressed and pawning gold, and I left a different name.

"My day for Jews," I thought, as the smelling salts and the nugget vanished into the fat hand, so like those other fat white hands it made me shudder. I saw again the old woman's malign eyes glinting above her bandages, and I remembered I had told Griggs she murdered de Grasse. That was going far. Should the Englishman be afflicted with a sense of public duty he might fry a pretty kettle of fish. Not that I cared except to keep out myself. Tinging my lenience toward her now came the lust for vengeance. I recognized this as my own personal feeling on Henri's behalf. We both knew she was a bad dog to have on our heels.

Not until the northern train was roaring and racing through tunnels with me safely tucked into a Pullman corner, did I get to looking on the other side of

the picnic. Somewhere in the night ahead lay Cobalt and Romance — we were indeed launched on an immense adventure. My spirits rocketed.

"Clarissa Kendall," said I. "What a chump you are not to have done it before?" And I'm afraid my self-reproach referred to borrowing that bottle.

CHAPTER V

American sleeping cars are the national proof of our high moral character. Of late years we seem to be slipping back — or is it forward? — to drawing-room coaches and the secluded variability of central Europe. But the twenty-four bedded Pullman, as originally constructed, will always be remembered to our credit. My hasty exit from New York was the first time I had ever met up with one of 'em; and to add to the insult I could only get a top berth.

Sleep didn't woo me much; when it did I dreamed. Old women started out of graves and trap doors opened like the jaws of death. Perhaps I talked some. They kept on rapping and tapping below and sishing for silence. Once the man next door pounded good and hard. Such cheek! He was bunked head to feet, our pillows must have lain about as close as married people's, with only a thin board between, and right there I made up my mind, so help me, never to splice with a man who snored.

Finally, I grew so tired of the orchestra, and lying on the half shell, I rang for the little set of steps and climbed down into the gray cold morning. Gray, did I say? Blue, indigo of the deepest dye, the early hour slump at its worst! Our porter saved my life by tipping me to beat it to the dining-car right after Buffalo. All the hungry folk had turned in early, and I got the last vacant table, and snatched the bill-of-

and then he whipped out a red leather notebook and proceeded to copy the winged snake.

"Make a hit-you-in-the-eye trade mark," William Watson Duffy commented to himself, as he snapped the elastic band and replaced the book in his pocket, before turning his attention to his grub.

Believe me, the Lord's Day Alliance have made it a grand bore to put in a Sunday alone in Canada. I wandered around till I was footsore and weary, going light on car fare, for every dime counts when you're not sure how or where the next dollar can be gleaned, but at that I payed a lot for storage on my body; we all do all the while, not half realizing it. Walking costs boot-leather, and sitting means a continual drain in hard cash. Sitting in vehicles costs hire, sitting in homes costs rents, sitting in hotels costs drinks and feeds — as I discovered. When flesh and blood could stand no more, I found a cosy corner in a mezzanine palm room, and I don't know how many times I ordered tea and toast from three to five.

Luck was fairly hunting me all the same. While I was leaning there on the marble rail, watching the men in the rotunda below, I suddenly spied a familiar figure.

"Ross! Or, I'll eat my hat!" I cried, pushing for a bell hop. And when the kid came I put the question straight.

"Yarsh," he replied, changing his wad of gum to the other cheek. "Charley Ross — Cobalt, whatcher want?"

"Look who's here!" my gold man cried a few minutes later, standing like a pillar under the low ceiling, and blotting out the rest of the room with his

breadth. I guessed from his hearty handshake we were glad to meet again. It was just as if we had never stopped getting along — as if Griggs had never butted in.

Of course he felt it his duty to dissuade me from going North, but, seeing I didn't budge from my determination, he promised to be godfather to the enterprise.

"I'm not living in the heart of Cobalt, you know, my claim lies up river, but I'll be there to-morrow morning and fix you up. Maybe seeing me around will frighten some of the wildcats away."

My eyes sparkled. "Wildcats! Are there really beasts of prey — is it so wild — can we hunt? I'm out for adventure — I'm crazy about it!"

He laughed uproariously. "Women beat the Dutch! Of course, if you're out for adventure, somebody's got to fall. But why do you pick upon me?"

His laugh and his twinkling eyes and this sort of talk, showed he was pleased as Punch over taking Clarissa on a holiday. For there being only one train and our tickets reading the same date, we were more or less obliged to go together. In fact he swiped the charge of me from the minute we met, and blew me to an elegant dinner with several mining men gathered round the festive board. It was a good beginning. Henri played up in crackerjack form, and whenever he's at his highest pitch, I queen it. The fellows seemed quite overcome by mirth and amazement, and Ross showed off his performing bear like a master mountebank, roaring almost continuously himself.

The gang put up a joke on us, telegraphed ahead, and had the Cobalt boys meet us with a royal welcome.

I was all sunned up and some looker when I stepped on to the platform; and, if it hadn't been for my heavy escort, I'd have been mobbed.

Mining costume — khaki riding pants, leather leggings, a blue flannel shirt, and any number of thick wool sweaters piled on according to the weather — made Ross look about the size of a heathen god; and being god on his own claim he voted himself leave. For a week we played together, seeing everything and everybody. He got wise to my being short of the ready, when I hung back from buying proper clothes, and took a little flyer in stock on my account; and then settled me for a morning's interview with Timothy Eaton's catalogue. The result, a transformed Clarissa, in clothes exactly seconding his own, met with more than approval. Maybe he thought I'd get fed up being treated so swell, and pack and quit. He'd given me seven days to tire of mining; by the end of that time I was just getting into my stride.

For one thing I had negotiated to pitch tent at the doctor's. A clean room, and good food, and not too much interference from his short-tempered, full-bosomed Irish housekeeper, seemed princely compared to Towne's Temperance Hotel, or even to my bunk at Buniva's. And another very ample reason cropped up in my having begun to make a living without working so hard that you'd notice it. Every now and again somebody would offer to buy or sell for me and cover before it was time to put up margin. Occasionally, it came off. When it didn't, he paid the piper. Henri held this was a piker's game and just like a woman — but it made the mare go.

Gradually, I came to understand the ins and outs

and ups and downs of mining, the raging hope and bitter disappointments which make these men mercurial. Ross had foreshadowed the business to me at "The Girl of the Golden West"; and now he showed me the actual operation from one end to the other on his own mine — the Victoria. She was a good claim. Her veins had assayed splendidly — till they sidestepped. Now it was up to the boss to outwit faults, relocate his fortune and get her going again; so presently, he cut away from me and the town life, and settled to it tooth and nail. Still there was more fun going in Cobalt any week than I'd had in my whole life before.

The Doc's house being central I grew kind of central too. Some of the bunch were always dropping in for a game.

"Which game?" Doc asked.

There must have been a dozen flirting with me, and some hard hit — but nix on the sentiment for Henri. Every evening the deck came out sooner or later, and that is where we made our killing. De Grasse is some little poker player, believe me! We won consistently, and the boys, white sports and bred in the bone gamblers, liked me the better for it.

Cobalt was a boom town in that day and not without its features: the drug store, because of temperance the rendezvous of good cheer, and the club, a very select institution putting a bold face on its main line of business and calling itself "The Mess." If a native belonged to the Mess, he was in it — otherwise away out at the back door. A conglomerate gang, twenty or more members, they all counted themselves my intimate friends. Certain personalities stood forth as

mirthmakers or were noted for a genial grouch, but Terrance O'Shaughnessy, familiarly known as the "Terrier," remained unquestioned leader. Brown of skin, blue of eye, ready of tongue, he was a very live wire indeed. His small head and delicate features giving the lie to iron muscles invited trouble and indirectly made him famous, for loud mouthed fellows didn't hesitate to pick a quarrel, and many a one wore his music-box out of condition in consequence. The hero of a hundred scraps added distinction by cursed bad luck, endless endurance, and a weakness for the fair sex; this being a gentlemanly inclination touched with the magic gift of understanding, we all encouraged him. Don't mistake me. He was no lap dog. The fastest paddler in a bush country enforces respect among men — but as a gambler — save the name! Every deal left him done brown on both sides and crisp at the edges.

By deduction the "Terrier" must have been a remittance man. He lived high at the Mess, with his hand always in his pocket and several kegs of the best brand open in his room; and then he'd go broke, and disappear down the French River about the date his notes fell due; lie low a while; flash back unheralded; clean up his financial slate and start something. Bully-Bill, his faithful henchman, helped him spend the money and drink the rye, and fluctuated with him like a changing tide.

CHAPTER VI

Spring had done her worst and left it at that. Washouts ceased from troubling, and the roads firmed — Cobalt took on a new lease of life.

Prospectors poured in, bought supplies, selected canoes, packed their dunnage, and were swallowed by the back country. Talk on the Doc's porch ran over with rich veins, lucky strikes or new flotations.

Every man in the Mess that year either went out himself or had somebody grub-staked.

Sol Graham, of course, couldn't leave the Kirkland; and Charley Ross was in the same predicament with his place — doing all his prospecting right there. He doubled his gangs and drove ahead like mad, but rumor had it the Victoria would peter out.

For six months or more my goldman had kept me guessing. At the opera he acted as if he might be soft, and I put him down for a hand-holder; but up here there were no signs of kidding. Not that I wanted it, mind you, spooning never was my style even before I grafted Henri, only the change got me going. Was he afraid I would take advantage — or was his attitude just the difference between a man's work and his play? I asked him once if he thought the girl of the Silver North gang as true as that Goldy Girl, and he snatched my hand and started to speak. I don't know what switched him off. In the end he merely pinched my elbow, and said I was a good

lapse. I only wish I was an engineer and pioneer like the rest of you — it's a great opportunity."

"You stand as good a chance of winning, Doc, as any of us. Bagster has the Terrier tied up in some sort of financial scrape, hard and fast, and with the Terrier and Bully paddling no one can beat him. Knowing the country so well, they will be in and stake the claim and out to register it, before the others are half way there — Bagster saves his two million, all right."

"Not so fast," says Ross, quietly. "The claim will be open. A man might camp —"

Jake shoved back his hat, thrust forth an aggressive chin, and settled the chair legs with a resounding whack.

"How in hell are ye going to know the date, if ye camp? There being no mortal means of communication with that claim except by water, the man who's fastest with the paddles gets the mine."

"Bet you ten to one Bagster don't," Charley replied, smiling. "I'm going to have a hard try against him."

"Done," cried Jake. "What in?"

"Hundreds."

Ross unfolded from the lower step and walked over to Barnum. "Got to get busy," he sang out.

I watched his eyes. He acted and looked like a different man — had he an idea? All at once Henri was taken with one of his yearnings towards dear old Ross; it made me get up and go over there, and I caught the bridle before he mounted, saying:

"Walk a bit — let's talk. I haven't seen you in a *dog*'s age — and you rush away faster than a rocket."

As he fell in beside me, I slipped an arm through his. It looks loverlike enough in writing, but you ought to have viewed the place. A short cut leads by the doctor's fence across to the main north road. There is more undisturbed ground here than anywhere else in the district, and perhaps an acreage of lush grass lying along the rail fences. The eastward and windy side is planted in pine, so that pine needles carpeted the road, while sapling birch trees, in full young leaf, leaned towards each other on the lower bank, making a dappled shade and a semblance of privacy — just the spot for confidences.

The Doc had been prophesying I'd fall for this lane as soon as spring was fairly awake; and I could see him making faces at Jake, and guess the form of his conversation next time we met. Ah — if he had only known.

"The Lelland is a big chance," I began. "Do you really think we can do anything?"

"We?" My quasi-sentimental companion almost overdid his part. Warmth softened his voice.

"Two heads are better than one," I said quietly, for danger lay in confusing Henri's passions and mine.

"So she thinks she can beat Bagster! You're the gamest little girl I ever met." His arm slid around me. I drew away — it was no time for twaddle — and answered, serious as a judge:

"I have a hunch we can win."

The big man stood gazing down at me for fifty seconds; then, something hard came over him. He tossed his head impatiently, like a colt fresh haltered.

"You're right, kid — the job won't wait. If I think up anything, I may tell you — I'll let you in.

getting on. The ticking clock accentuated monotony, only relieved by a dull roar once in a while from our lively neighbour.

I rose and paced the little room fighting off stupor.

"Clarissa Kendall," said I, "hold yourself alert. This is one of the hours about which literature is as a scaffold, and play-acting but the bricks and mortar. This is Fate's tremendous climax for you — everything hangs in the balance. You either win out and be something from this time on — or you sink to the level of the scrap heap — perhaps marry — do and become something utterly ordinary. You've been up here since lunch-time keeping a nice jog trot over other people's tracks — now get busy and blaze a trail. We've got to strike for ourselves. We've got to get right away from the water and go inland. We've got to manage to go inland quicker than the boys can paddle — we've got a devil of a job, for it's thick woods every inch of the way. We've got to —"

Pontiac roared again heavily, and all at once the big idea up and slapped me in the face — biff! Just like that.

"Got it! Got it! so help me!" I cried, driving one fist into the other palm. "I own the mine — I own two million dollars' worth of mine — I own the Lelland!"

And we did own it without possibility of failure, if my plan went through — but I must have help.

A dash of temper, like the bitters in a cocktail, makes life tasty. I thought of Ross and hated him. But he had been a good pal. It was up to me to take him in. I owed it to him — and I must have help.

No longer cool — plumb intoxicated, plumb crazy, I capered in my joy. Then, canned it sudden, for my scheme required time, and every hour saved might mean success. Shoes in hand I sneaked down past the dining room door; I fanned my fingers thumb to nose, and grinned my compliments at the bunch playing their measly dollar-limit, and flung a leg over Pepper Pot, Jake's fiery young mare.

Silent as a pair of hold-up men we edged down to the short cut, and then, throwing caution to the winds, shot out a flying unit in the night.

Rockefeller'd sell the Standard Oil to feel a tenth of our elation. Success sang in the warm air streaming by, a heart light as a feather challenged Fate. Exultation burst forth in whoops of joy. If I'd packed a gun, I'd have been shooting up the place. Gee! what it means, that mood! Wasting cartridges just to hear it bark!

Whooping kept the nag to her pace fine, Jake having known joy in his day too. But by-and-by the roads hardened and we slowed down. I wasn't taking any chances on a horse's legs — particularly his horse. With the slackening of our pace my mood suddenly changed. I became keenly alive to some mysterious force resisting me. The uncanniness of it appalled. I knew I was in the center of a great battle which I could neither see, nor hear, nor feel. I noticed the sky had gloomed up. Over my head stars twinkled, but a wall of solid blackness rose like a rock in front.

Pepper put up her nose and sniffed and whinnied. Big drops splashed on my hands. We were in for a storm, sure, but I reckoned a horse was neither sugar

nor salt and urged her forward. She cowered. The darkness held a menace for horseflesh too. I felt my hand on the rein shaking.

A bolt of lightning fell through the sky straight to earth. It cut the night like a band of bright ribbon, and turned blackness into tawny yellow. Some storm! Another bolt fell, and another and another. Lightning rained from heaven. It didn't seem possible that they were falling harmlessly into the great wilderness separating the Lelland from Cobalt. With the first of the shocks my companion planted her feet firmly, and refused to budge. I got down, tugging on the bridle, but it was no use; she stood as firmly fixed as a bronze statue. Jake's horse taking on so about a rain shower! I flecked her with the whip till she whinnied.

So far there had been no sound, now the thunder struck us peal after peal. It roared around us. A battery of great guns seemed to be stationed in every quarter of the compass. The power of the storm shook the rocks on which we stood. Quite suddenly I was overcome by a terrific nausea. I felt as if I were fighting against horrible odds in a losing fight. I couldn't get my breath right. I couldn't think, it was as if Nature had withdrawn her support. And then I knew that Nature must be against me, even as I was against Nature. I saw Henri de Grasse and Clarissa Kendall, two souls in a single body, as a terrible blot on the order of things, a blasphemy against every natural law.

I felt I was cursed. I was in a worse plight than Cain's. I had not unnaturally killed my brother, but I had unnaturally made him live. Even in the animal

shivering at my side I found evidence of the monstrous iniquity.

"You will never prosper," voices of the storm sang. "We are against you. Beware!" My heart sank into my boots; animal fear communicated itself to me. I leaned against the horse and shook, and the more I shook the more she shook. We shivered there together, my face hidden in her neck, while the bolts continued to split the north, turning banked clouds into a tawny daylight.

A sharp noise pierced the roll of thunder, the rattle of hailstones on bush. We stood in the open and the stones flung themselves against us, yet they were less real than the facts hurling through my chaotic senses. "You are against Nature — and Nature is against you — Look out!" I groped in black terror, but had never an idea of giving up. When the storm had emptied its wicked heart, and slid away to the southwest, I remounted Pepper, and we proceeded wearily to the Victoria.

The bunk houses sheltering Charley's wops lined the road, and I didn't fancy riding between them, so I tethered my pony, and cut across to the office where Ross lived. A glance in at one of the windows gave me his whole situation. He sat at a table covered with section maps, his head sunk in his hands. The slope of his shoulders — that tired look — put me wise to his being broke. Things looked worse than gossip represented them. I guessed Charley was keeping a stiff upper lip. Mines aren't much on accommodation and discomfort's hell when one's down and out. His bunk wasn't made up — looked as if it hadn't been since Musson left. Wearing ap-

parel lay about, muddy boots had been kicked off and let lie anyhow. Dinner, untouched, sat on the back of the stove, while a coffee pot kept company with the lamp and maps. I saw at once Ross was one of those nice burly man-children, who never grow up and are utterly incapable of taking care of themselves.

While I watched, he straightened out his long legs, rammed his hands deep into his pockets, and glowered at the floor. He looked all in — despondent to the verge of suicide; so I beat it 'round to the front and banged a regular salvo for admittance.

Charley, standing, filled the whole opening; and surprise — there isn't a star in the film world could match his face.

"I've got it! The Lelland's ours!" I cried, and, not waiting for a welcome, pushed inside.

He blinked owlishly. "Clarissa Kendall! At this time — what's up?"

"Bagster's up the spout."

He didn't seem to hear, and, now the moment had come, I was trembling. My plan bubbled out topsy-turvy.

"We'll need men and dynamite — lots of it. The charges must be awful big — a dozen camps won't give you the right start." Words tumbled out faster and faster, till I saw him register the "are-you-mad" expression; and I flopped into a chair to recover breath.

"Wake up, man! I'm onto it — do you hear? The Lelland's ours." Damnation! he was going to be polite and fatherly.

"I'm not drunk!" I yelled, and then, mastering emotion, tried another line.

"This is a deal between you and me — is it fifty-fifty? Do you want to come in — or shall I carry my idea elsewhere? There's not an hour to lose — take it or leave it." That stung. Make any human being mad, and it's serious at once.

I pounded my fists on the table.

"Listen — There's only one thing will travel through this country faster than the Terrier and Bully-Bill in a light canoe — and that is sound. We are going to signal the news in."

He got me. I never saw a man so flabbergasted. For long seconds he stood staring as though without a ray of intelligence, but all the while his brain was making lightning dashes, hither and thither, through the Canadian bush. He turned. Feverish shuffling of the maps and hurried calculations convinced him of the scheme's workability; and then the giant sought for me with bloodshot eyes.

"Girl!" he cried. "We're made! Shake on it."

I guess I was more pleased at being treated like a real man partner, than over any amount of palaver.

We sat down on opposite sides of the table and worked out details; and, when all was ready, Ross strode to the door, flung it open, and bellowed into the night. Night — did I say? It was cold gray morning.

"Hi, there, boys! Shorty — Green, hi!"

A whisk of wind scampering around the corner tossed his great voice across the clearing. And while we waited for signs of life, I did a little calculating on my own.

From the moment we heard of the fault in title de Grasse had been rampant. I thought like de Grasse,

lock and key — meaning strict supervision — so I divorced etiquette, and every time he appeared on the street, I'd go out and flag him.

"Making yourself too cheap, kid," growled Jake. "You're overdoing it."

And I was. By the fourth day my quarry turned mouse-shy — that is how I came to miss his getaway.

Green stormed in one morning white about the gills. "What in the blankety blank — blank — blank — blank! Don't you know O'Shaughnessy and Bully left town yesterday?"

My spine went soft as a pail of mush. "But the claims aren't open!" I stammered.

"They've got something up their sleeve. There's nothing to prevent them tapping our wires, if they're on. That Dan Toms is a low-down, yellow-livered cuss — heaven help him if I find a leak!"

"Our signals! You don't mean they've got wise to our scheme! They wouldn't dare. Why we could throw them off with one little false blast."

"And pitch ourselves into the ditch too. Who's to tip our boys that we're raising the bets out of malice? We don't start no signals till the claims are open."

My spirits tumbled into deepest midnight. Hope lay down on me. I was obsessed again by the terrific sense of Nature in all her power and might being arrayed against us. And when news of the Lelland being opened fired the town, I went out to get my nag with a lead sinker in place of my heart.

There's tonic in a gallop on a fine clear day, one's pulses answer to the rhythmic thudding of the horse's hoofs. We cut the time to the Victoria pretty close, and I managed a regular "cheer, oh" for Green and

the boys. Our enthusiasm mounted during the hasty embarking and the straight bright course we steered to portage. Gleaming paddles dipped and carried forward shimmering and dipped again; and all our breath was in our work. We were ahead of the rush and wasted no time before setting off the fuse.

Dizzy thunder overwhelmed us. Lord! What a charge! Then we stood tense in the silence straining every nerve to hear, till from far away there sounded back the ghost of an explosion. Johnson and Foster, camped beyond, had got our news and sped it. At a single crack, we were away ahead of the game — but were we? Nature was working with us, she had carried our signal, but we could not code her. She screamed her message on the hilltop for all initiated ears to understand.

A fellow who was holding down a bum claim near portage came over to ask what all the row was about, and did we think we were blowing up a blooming fortress, or only prospecting on government property? He said the Terrier and Bully had gone through a couple of days before. Hustling they were, but looking powerful well set up and pleased with the universe. It was his opinion nobody had a chance against them two for the Lelland.

Green and I avoided each other's eyes. We were mortally certain now that somebody had tipped them off. A chain is no stronger than its weakest link — and it took a lot of links to reach into that northern wilderness. Still, Ross was ahead, well ahead, if he hadn't got into difficulty and had to turn back. But he was alone — and the Terrier and Bully were awful fast paddlers.

The sickening sense of failure lay upon my spirits like a pall. I got out of bed with it in the morning and covered myself with it at night. And Nature did her damnedest. A bright dry spell gave place to tearing winds, and the winds brought the smell of scorched brush to our very door step. Things were doing up North. I knew it would take something more than trivial to turn Ross from his goal — but a forest on fire is no child's toy. What is having a start compared to being out of the woods, literally? As soon as I finished worrying over the fire, a new line started. Ross was ahead of the game; he was expert and careful, and had his nerve with him, and he wasn't under that mad pressure of haste that drives a man beyond his better judgment — as a matter of fact he'd be giving the Terrier two days more than was coming to him. Gee! If he didn't hustle!

Then there was the possibility of a blow on one of the wide lakes, a mess in the rapids, an upset with loss of boat and grub, which would mean striking for civilization the sooner the better. I cursed our arrangement for the last blast, which had necessitated Ross's going on alone — and yet that last blast might be the straw to break our rival's back. Our signals must have travelled farther than the enemy could make in forty-eight hours. Barring accidents — barring accidents! But I wouldn't let myself build on it. And we had no news.

In the blighted uncertainty of those days Clarissa commenced to hanker for town; for lights and noise and people and buildings — and for a less strenuous life. Oh, to be lost in a crowd once more, unhonored and unsung — and unobserved. Cobalt looked sud-

denly vulgar and raw, compared to her sisters, a stupid little busy-body. I resented Jake's counsel and even the Doc's mild jokes. I refused to swap yarns with the bunch. My mind was entirely full of one adventure — the end of which was yet unwritten. A more thoroughly disagreeable hotch-potch of ill-humor, nerves, uncertainty and expectation couldn't have been found to dine at anybody's table. I marvel Doc didn't throw me out by the scruff of the neck.

And all the while I was rude to them, I was cogitating in the bottom of my brain pan, that maybe I'd dig out — if Ross got back safe.

He did get back safe — and first. He beat the Terrier to it by an hour and a half. He'd just finished his job and was enjoying a pipe preparatory to starting home, and chuckling to think how much time he had on the rest, when the two showed up. It's lucky for him it was Terry, any couple of ordinary roughhouse prospectors would have murdered him on the spot, or have done him dirt in some way. But O'Shaughnessy was born a gentleman, and he stood for fair play all along the line. Bully told how they hung on Ross's trail every mile of the way back, hoping he'd come a cropper. But he picked up his own boys at the first camp, and a couple more farther down. By the time they reached Portage there was a regular army of them ready to defend our man and our rights against all comers.

Immediately on registering the claims Ross announced my partnership; and I'll own I was tickled to death to find him giving me full credit for the idea. Our crowd could hardly believe their ears. They did the handsome thing by me. We celebrated long and

broad and wide; and of course Henri, being beyond the grasp of their practical minds, girlie had to stand up and take the salutes. But de Grasse proved right again — it's safer not to attract too much attention. After the pow-wow those boys began to fall away, scared I think. Men don't like women who are capable of beating them. I soon understood the Lelland business had cooked my goose with the bunch. Some of the old hands had grown grouchy, while I appeared to be so mad about the Terrier; and now they saw through that game they turned scornful as well as peeved — didn't take any stock in it or me. Terry himself wasn't struck on being a loser, so he made tracks for the bush, quick.

But the most startling part of the change sprang from my turning into a capitalist. Ross sold the claim straight to Bagster for over two millions, and plunked down fifty per cent. like a white man. I was rich — enormously rich — rich beyond my wildest dreams. Dollars burnt my pockets; I pined for the open and limitless spending ground of Broadway and Fifth Avenue. Moreover, it wasn't any fun to be in Cobalt and not ring in with the right crowd. One by one, as my steadies dropped from the lists, new blood rushed in; and the weight of Success again blighted my innocent enjoyment. I had to keep a hold on the dough now — it was up to me to look out for sharks in the swimming pool. Men I had never known came up and gave me the glad hand like they'd been intimates all our lives. Speculators strove to cultivate me — I was bored. It seemed as if every heavy champion in the countryside made an excuse to stop at Doc's.

"Octopuses," Jake called them. "They're after

you, girl. Scutter and leave him to me," he'd croak from under his broad brim, when we saw a stranger coming. By-and-by I fled the veranda altogether; the drugstore and the main street knew my face no longer; a chill began to creep over our evening game.

No complaints, mind you, I'm only telling how it was. After all we'd glammed in the north what we set out for, and I guess when you've got yours its pretty generally always time to quit.

Ross came around a lot to make up for the cold shoulder. Things began to look as if he was more than on the inside; and remarks could be winged frequently about his paying over a million sans struggle, because he was so jolly sure of getting it back with interest. It being none of the town's business, we kept right on going together. I liked him and he liked me; we'd been first rate pals, and we'd brought off something big, shoulder to shoulder, which creates about the niceest kind of tie and relationship. I never gave his side a serious thought, till one evening down in the short cut.

I was dressed up and I had to hold my skirts with both hands, the road being squashy along those fields. The night was sweet. Watching from Doc's stoop, moon and trees and sky had rested as still as death, but a tiny breeze blowing there by the river whisked a lock across my face. It was maddening. I shook my head and flopped the hair back, and blew upward, and each time the lock floated over again. Soon, I was tossing like a cow in a pasture full of green flies. Exasperated beyond enduring the pesky thing I turned to Ross:

"Just tuck the hair back, will you, please? It's worse than a New Jersey mosquito!"

Who'd ever have thought a nose tickle could lead to sentiment!

He raised his hand, glanced at it and hesitated, as though his servant were going into action over something high and holy, and wasn't, perhaps, quite fit for office. And then he fixed me up A1. But I knew by his hesitation that I'd started trouble. A man don't hold off about touching a girl, unless he cares for her, and means to get her where the other fellows will have to hold off for keeps.

We travelled a bit and leaned on a barred gate admiring the palish landscape; there he snatched an occasion to sail right in. He told me he was stony-broke at the Victoria — stony flat-broke — not knowing how to pay the men, hardly, and almost in despair, when I came along and gave him the big idea. "Gave it to me," were the words he emphasized.

Of course, being a man and having got something, he wanted a whole lot more. He wouldn't ask me while he was broke, he said; which explains his shying off once or twice, but now things looked different.

I kind of wanted to stay up there and marry Ross. You see I was plumb scared — afraid of my own luck — and he shone a fixed star in a fluxing firmament. He was so manly and big and safe. I discounted town-tattle, knowing he had enough for himself and brains to make good on the start; probably his half of the fortune would spell ten times, when mine had dwindled to a fraction. I felt pitifully small compared to the money — and the blood-suckers' interest *in the* money — experiencing how it had upset my

apple cart with the boys made me timid; but it wasn't the business end I was thinking of so much then, as his needing me round to sort up that shack. However, what's the use? Henri would have none of it.

Things looked different, as Ross said; that's where the rub came. They looked different to Henri also. He was crazy to get out and play with my bank balance. I was overwhelmed in a new and personal sense by the idea of being against Nature. In a flash I understood these weeks of restlessness — I realized I had no choice but Manhattan.

Charley took this medicine like a man — there was no apparent need to feel weepy — after all he wasn't a loser on my account. We had made him a present of a cool million.

CHAPTER VIII

The first thing I did when I reached "little old New York," and had put up on the level at the Ritz, was to strike for Bain & Dingley's lingerie department, and buy about half the stock I used to spend so much of my time selling.

I piled the choicest confections into a taxi and took them right home — some class to being at home in the palm parlors! And after wallowing in hot water, which was a treat too, Doc's joint having sold short on baths and not having covered, I spent a whole day slipping those lush garments off and on, and admiring myself in ribbony, lacy, delicious, delicate icy-creamy finery. Wasn't I the doll! But say! The cash I ran through fairly made my eyes water.

Gold doesn't have a chance to burn one's pockets long in a metropolis. It burns too hot. That quaint, peculiar odor folks associate with London they will say is fog — Lummy! It's the smell of scorching cloth; and we've got the same here attributed to other causes. Getting together a wardrobe didn't occupy a week; and presently I began to sup the bitter dregs of idleness. I hadn't a thing to do — no place to go but out, nothing to wear but clothes. It's right lonely and a trifle cold sitting on top of a million plunks, unless one knows the signals for the other people in the same altitude and my list of acquaintances ranged chiefly in Bain & Dingley's, which Henri had scored off.

During the third week my spirits ran so low I hiked down to see old Buniva. Of course I'd paid her the board money and sent her an extra ten to sweeten her dinner of herbs, so she flushed at me in really embarrassing joy; talked volubly of a full house and an easy pocket; and regretted she couldn't let me have my old room. Gee! I showered her with questions trying to find out if Jacobs had made any attempt to nab me. And thinking about him and all the shady business gave me a notion to hunt up Howard Griggs.

The ghost of my last appearance might be laid. Nobody would suspect a young lady domiciled at the Ritz Carlton, and paying her bills regularly, of such a crime as a petty theft. I wondered how Griggsy had squared it with the owner of the sniff bottle, and determined, if he was on this side of the pond, to learn without delay.

His club acknowledged him within hail, so I beat it to the unconscious fence and gathered in my wares. Sight of Ross's nugget glued me all up with sentiment, but by the evening I had recovered sufficiently to compile a neatly worded note apologizing for having carried away Miss Swanhill's belonging, packed among my things by mistake, and asking him to tea next day.

For all the world like Henri and me at work in the old quarters! It gaye us quite a little fillip toward adventure.

At our last meeting Griggs had played up fine, and we counted on him as a good scout. I didn't for a minute fancy his hounds had been nosing my track; but nevertheless I knew there was going to be a large slice of explanation served with our little party.

Now that appearances didn't cut much ice; when we weren't wanting to interest Howard particularly, or to exploit his interests; and I could don one choice dress or five according to my whim, getting ready wasn't anything like the same pure joy. I wore a marvellous greenery-bluerie, slimpsy, net and silk affair, with high heeled, conspicuously buckled shoes, rivalling Mrs. Jacobs's, and a regular poultice of violets on my front. An astonishing hat that had set me back three hundred bucks topped the bow. Say, I wish the Cobalt crowd could have seen me!

H. G. turned up on time, as round and pink and kiddish looking as ever, and bubbling enthusiasm. I reckon nobody would have guessed his age for what it was, but when one came to know him he had a great deal of savvy, as he'd proved helping me out of that last scrape. And would you believe it, he acted so refined and considerate over the subtraction of milady's bottle, making light of the inconvenience, and not asking one question; I was suddenly moved to tell him all about the opium, and cast hastily for an excuse to be wearing a maid's uniform.

In his gentlemanly way Howard gave me to understand he had never entertained suspicions not entirely complimentary, and was deft enough to furnish the excuse himself.

"I thought — ah — you must be a detective. A female Sherlock Holmes, don't you know, doing it for fun, and all that. Girls go in for such queer pastimes in America."

"You disapprove of us, and yet you hang around," I laughed.

He raised a downy pair of brows. "Spend nine

months in New York! — jolly likely!" Then he hurried on, fearful lest he had wounded my deeper sentiment.

"I've been home since you left — and I'm going again. But I have to return. Really, I occupy the post of watch dog, appointed by a troublesome, deceased, male relative. So long as my niece Angelica desires to remain, I'm booked to stick along and — ah — take care of her."

The subject of Angelica, probably a flapper in pigtails and a knee skirt didn't interest me 'specially, so I waded into my tale.

Thinking up the old excitement and dragging it all out for our guest's inspection proved very upsetting to de Grasse. We had been so completely and happily occupied making a fortune in Cobalt, he seemed to have forgotten that awful woman, the winged snake, the Jacobs and their opium den. But now his blood, or rather mine, boiled with indignant vexation.

Henri started talking and I couldn't stop him — I was terribly afraid Griggs would fancy Clarissa had been imbibing too freely, particularly at the snake part. But he, being a crank on hypnotism, agreed with every detail, and was certain the symbol, having come to me at the time of the murder, must be the key to the murderer. Then I gave Henri his head. I suppose it is natural for a man to wax graphic over murder — a murder in his own family — even if he is the corpse.

Griggs electrified me by his keen spirit. He wanted to turn in and help us chase them. Of course it was the super-physical, super-mental brush of the serpent's wings that drove him to such thoroughly un-English

lengths, and the chances are he'd get cold feet once at home again under his valet's eagle eye, but for the nonce we three were white hot on the scent — and we did enjoy ourselves.

Howard sat forward, elbows on table, his hands supporting his chubby chin, and his white spats entwining the lower rung of a gild-edged chair.

"You said, at the time, something about de Grasse — bally funny — would you — ah — care to repeat it?"

"Sure. No objections to putting myself on record. The old party murdered de Grasse — I'll be sworn to that."

"But, I say! How do you know? Rummy thing her hiding there, isn't it? What makes you think she referred to him?"

Even Griggs could hardly be expected to stand for the real truth about Henri and me, so I saw I'd have to clam up some on facts.

"I've got a hunch," I said positively. "And, moreover — now this will astonish you — although the old woman was bandaged so that I saw her upper face first, and then the lower part, and never the whole of it at once, I'd swear — yes, I'd almost swear she was Lady Deering."

Astonish him! Heavens! My shot took effect like a gas bomb. The boy sat back stunned, grinning at me with fixed eye-balls and a dropped jaw. He'd gone limp all up and down his spine, so I ordered brandy, and babbled nothings till he got his second wind.

"Ah — ah — impossible, quite impossible —" he floundered. And taking himself in hand. "Jove,

you know, it can't be — Lady Deering is my niece."

My turn on the high trapeze. "Niece!" I cried. "*Niece!* Why she's more than old enough to be your mother!"

He drained the brandy glass, round-eyed still in amazement, and gasped out bits of their family history for my enlightenment.

"Corking situation — eh? Second marriages — youngest sons, and all that — happens in the best of families. Old lady handed over to me as a ward till 1920 — no ages mentioned in the will — only dates. Crazy old Indian beggar, mad on dates. Got to put up with it or go into chancery. I — ah — I can assure you that Lady Deering is perfectly respectable."

We roared with laughter, while confusion painted me tomato red, and Henri, blandly smiling, thought his own thoughts.

To squelch Henri, and extricate myself from the social mess, I began to tell how the snake sign had been bothering me since my return to New York. Griggs was immensely interested, and wanted me to spiel it before some of his high-brows on spiritualism — suggested arranging an interview with Angelica. But there Henri refused point-blank.

"The funny thing is," I continued, "that hieroglyphic used to pop in and away just by itself, now I always see it accompanied by a child's rubber."

"A what?"

"A rubber — rubbers." Raising my voice as if the Englishman were deaf instead of dull. "Rubbers — the things you put on to keep from catching cold in the rain."

"Oh — galoshes! Jove, yes! A child's rubber. Top hole! A child's rubber!" he gurgled.

"I'm serious though. Maybe it's the association of place or —" I was on the verge of giving the whole show away, but pulled up sudden, and added lamely, "I haven't had enough amusement, the creature dogs my waking and sleeping hours. I'm going to take a holiday and then I shall do a little detective work later on."

"Hot stuff! I intend, with your permission, to help you do that detective work. I can't believe Angelica would be associated with such — persons. Still, if the resemblance was strong enough to impress you under such circumstances, they might be able to make some use of it which would — er, involve her unpleasantly. I have to remind myself frequently that Lady Deering is, ah — almost a public character."

"The old woman at Jacobs's was certainly the spittin' image of the picture on the front of that programme you gave me — I remember looking at it while I was packing and being almost sure at the time."

"It bears looking into — but do make it later. Too bally warm for duty now, don't you know? Allow me to introduce Miss Swanhill so you can ascertain where the house is. I blundered in there and I'm sure would never be able to locate it again. Tea to-morrow, eh, what? You and Miss Erma and Beaty Swanhill — a party of four — we'll motor somewhere. But — ah — 'mum's the word,' as your delightful language says, mum's the word regarding this situation. Miss Erma's tongue — jolly active — hung in the

middle and wags at both ends. No confidences — eh, what?"

After weary weeks of splendid isolation I snatched his invitation like a starved pup snapping at a bone. I was agog with curiosity to meet his friends, too, and it was not until I commenced contemplating the female of the species that I realized how little money I'd spent. What price a woman's hats and gowns? I didn't own an article but clothes — not even a twinkler. While she showed me vistas — steam yachts, automobiles and a house or two.

"What's wrong with you, Henri?" says I. "Going to sleep at the switch?"

Buzz-buggies can't be wished into a garage; so I had to ride with Howard in the yellow car. But I beat it to Tiff's early next morning and I sure got some covert notice for the three gems I was wearing padlocked on to my neck and arms.

Beaty Swanhill being a broker, and me knowing so little small talk, we naturally gassed about shares, and profit and loss, and unearned increment. I admire men who can wind business like a dark thread on the shuttle of light conversation, and then carry forward. The talk made me feel as jolly and comfortable as if I had still been in the backwoods, and so we were friends from the start, he coming to meet me about as fast as his gentle sister hiked away.

Coming didn't do Beaty any harm either. After a while I began to loosen up on the personal prospect, and when he discovered I was drawing merely bank interest on over a million, I thought he would faint. Howard didn't get a look in from that on.

Swanhill held the conversation to its course with a high hand, offering all sorts of advice on what to buy — railroads and good dividend payers. You see Henri wasn't strong on security, he was all for the make. To lie low and then slam our last dollar into some fool risky enterprise would have been his way, so the idea of a sound investment such as steel preferred had been itching me. But Wall Street is a long way down, and it springs kind of mysterious — anyway I hadn't made up my mind.

Now it appeared if I opened an account with Silsby, Banks and Swanhill, I'd only have to telephone once in a while and they'd do the heavy truck work — a regular toy for children.

He shook his head at Cobalts as mostly on the Curb, and made them seem awfully out of class.

"Can one buy rubber any place?" I asked, suddenly remembering the new phase of my mascot.

"Yes, rubber shares are quoted on the London exchange. But I wouldn't advise it, Miss Kendall. They're speculative — very speculative."

Henri pricked up his ears at that. "Suits me — I wish you'd cable for some to-morrow — at the market." And when I mentioned the amount, he nearly fell over again, said I was a high flyer and shook his head dubiously.

And I had vainly fancied I would be able to direct Henri's financial operations.

Well, what's the good of having a hunch if you don't play it? The winged snake had always brought us luck.

CHAPTER IX

In spite of Miss Swanhill's I-don't-care-to-associate-with-you attitude I went about with them quite a lot, Beaty arranging parties of four, including me, and after Griggs left, some gilded male of his down-town acquaintance so very desirable as to overcome milady's aversion.

With matrimonial opportunity he bribed her to let the light of her aristocratic countenance shine upon his protégée, and I must say he played her fair, keeping the quarry right under her guns, and covering me all the time himself as if I had been an escaped criminal. I could have killed him for it whiles, as I'd have welcomed a change, and several of the fellows he brought along knew real business and were far too interesting to waste on an evening's patter. Then, remembering how lonesome I had been before he began to hang round, I called myself down sharp for ingratitude, and took amusement out in watching both their antics when some coveted plutocrat got a notion to change loads himself.

Although young and prettish, there was something unlikeable about Erma — she was too cold-blooded for humanity, and her nags showed signs of restlessness rather frequently. Once the prize stallion of the ring kicked clean over his traces; slipped his arm through mine in a masterful way after dinner, and walked me off, leaving the others to follow.

her show her heels to the wind. We were running smooth as ball bearings, cutting the water sharp, but simply dreaming along, till suddenly I saw the nose of a white boat creep up on my left.

"Full steam!" I yelled, bracing myself for the race. I thought it was one of the yacht club fleet.

The stranger pulled even and I took a flying look at her. She might have been about our own build, appearing larger owing to the light hull, but she was showering the salt spray like a bird of Paradise — too much resistance.

We struck into our speed by then and she slipped to the rear before I had time to glimpse her captain, nevertheless I heard him call:

"Bet you forty to one!"

"Nothing doing! — Never bet on a sure thing!" The owner of the *Swallow* yelled derisively. "Pile it into her, Tom!"

He gave her all the juice there was, and we leapt forward.

With clear water ahead the pilots could afford to watch each other and enjoy the sport. I glanced over my shoulder. The white craft reared, honest she did! Stood up on her rudder, and with a cloudy pother of foam under her ribs made after us. But we held our distance.

"What's your name?" hollered her master. "I'll double the odds!"

I shook my head, grinning. We flew at a devil of a pace now and I had no time for words. He was not a man easily discouraged.

"Lunch with me if I win," he cried. I fancied I must have met him and forgotten, and was about to nod.

acceptance, when I saw his bow a bare inch behind mine — even — ahead. Gee! Losing that race was worse than losing my character. I couldn't believe my eyes, and didn't cinch the reason till his stern was overlapping us. Then I saw the *Swallow'd* dropped her speed. Any Christian who thinks my temper wasn't at boiling point has got another guess coming!

The white boat sailed away from pursuit, her boss sitting erect and cupping one hand to cry aspersions across the lengthening space of foam-flecked water: "Quitter!"

Outlined against the Recket's blue of August midday he seemed about thirty years old. His blue jersey bathing suit showed off good muscular proportions. Though he was a bit on the heavy side for an athlete he might easily have classed under training. Above a flat forehead a thick crop of brown hair rose straight on end, giving him a very wide-awake expression. He looked as fresh as he acted, and that's quite some. In soup and fish he might have been anybody or nobody — I was too mad to take stock in him.

"You lost that race! You did it on purpose!" I flung the words savagely at Tom.

"The fellow's an impudent puppy," growled my engineer. "'Lunch with me!' Gosh! What does he think we are anyway?"

"Why, I know him! I knew his face perfectly well. You don't understand. He was asking the name of the boat. I must have bowed to him some place and forgotten."

"He was not asking the name of the boat. He was damned fresh! He could have run us bow and bow,

docked a minute behind and made good on the introduction. I know the breed. A financial upstart with an eye like a hawk's for money, and perfectly unscrupulous methods of advancing his own interests."

"Shut up!" I snapped. "You're not running this boat, and you have no call to run me."

The way we sulked home was a sample of our nasty natures, but I couldn't bring myself to sack Tom, he was a real person in his way and always ready to fetch and carry on shore.

I might have had a swell time that summer playing with the Swanhills and their crowd, if Henri de Grasse hadn't everlastingly been butting in. He hated to see me lolling about enjoying candy instead of cigars, and flirting. He was dead scared I'd marry, for men make themselves heroes to a dollar princess, so to divert me he grew more keen on showing up the murder.

Every week he'd haul me back to town and begin negotiations for detective work — now on one line and now on another. We found the mansion with the sliding panels and rented the house next door. When the keys were handed over and the agent finally left us, Henri rushed at the business feverishly. We put in a morning calculating how much of our wall lay against the wall of Jacobs's wing smoking room; and just about where we would strike into the latter if an opening were cut through.

Sakes! It was hot that August in New York! De Grasse had to back out himself once or twice and beat it for a cool corner. We received lots of bids to Deal Beach and such places, and doubtless the necessity of returning to town, of coming and going and flitting about was the best medicine for my social standing.

Nobody knew that during my absences I was sweltering over Henri's murder in close Manhattan. Racing back and forth lent me the appearance of a very popular young lady — I was IT.

Clarissa gave up buying diamonds, Henri didn't think much of jewelry, and bought rubber instead. Beaty Swanhill kept on warning me, but every time I saw the winged snake with that doll galosh floating alongside, I just naturally had to go and order some more of the stock. After a while it began to soar and Beaty's eye beamed an appreciative, critical glance as we discussed business. He thought I was the foxy grandma, all right! And was dying to know my mentor.

By this time the lists of my personal property showed a limousine, open car, victrola, golf sticks, polo costumes, wrist watches and innumerable junk. All that the swells flaunted I could match, and more. Thanks to Cobalt I could out-ride them, and out-dress them. I had natural advantages over the ruck in looks, and was perfectly Scot free. Moreover and above — I boasted brains. Henri led me the long way round from lots of pitfalls; and I gave him certain pointers on tactics. We sure had the men going down by the sea, but the women — nix on the swell women! They get my goat! There's more breadth in the thickness of a man's little finger nail, than in the whole avoirdupois of those social leaders. They never accept you for what you are, though some of them will come across for what you have, and any of them for what your grandfather had — if he had enough! It was the women put me on to getting old Aunt Elizabeth's ear-rings back, and having them fixed up with

diamonds instead of the original bits of colored glass. I simply yearned to reveal my ancestors under a spotlight, as it were; and therefore all that followed from the ear-rings is up to that female bunch. But it doesn't belong here, and if I ever get the facts misplaced — Lord! I'll be in a regular mess.

I could write an entire book on the history of my summer, and it would be rapid history too, with the old ladies snubbing, and the young ones jealous, and all makes of available bachelors jostling to shove in line for a grab at my money bags, or at least to beg a ride in the *Swallow*. Such stuff has been written and published before this — and purchased and devoured. The human bug is interesting enough in his more complex motives, if one hasn't heaps of pulse-stirring adventure to recite — things happening bang! biff! bang! — like a bunch of firecrackers going off. I mean to tell the adventures and let each reader figure out for himself how everybody looked, and what they wore at the circus, and who thought this about that one, and so on and so forth.

Truth is I almost stopped thinking myself during the height of the season. Hurly-burly wasn't any name for life! Proposals popped like champagne corks, and, take it from me, in our crowd that indicates frequency. Mostly it was the little make or break one-cylinder engines missed fire; boys who had run in, God knows how, for a week-end with the big speed, and who would never have another chance.

But I didn't fall for sentiment, not even from Beaty Swanhill — and Beaty was reckoned quite a bit of a catch socially.

CHAPTER X

About the time autumn turned too cold for motor-boating, Griggs cabled his arrival. He had gone over for grouse; had never missed the twelfth at Hellingham in his life, and seemed to think that date awfully important. Do you get it — crossing the great big ocean to shoot birdies! Dates must run in families like twins and strawberry leaves. Well, Howard took his fill of the sport and started back, and I was tickled by the news because we'd cooked it up to go in on this detective business together, and Henri was champing his bit.

Of course I didn't live in that small house we had rented, lying in the bosom of Jacobs's L. We were in no position to court attention or comment, and while one can be pretty sure of New Yorkers not knowing or caring anything about their poorer neighbors, naturally a smuggling bunch would have their eyes peeled in all directions, so we came and went from that place unostentatiously by night.

Excitement is no word for Griggs's frame of mind when I let him in on the scheme. And when we actually began to work with picks and hammers in a bare, darkly shuttered room, its only light turned and shaded to throw a spot on the conspirators, our red corpuscles scampered like mice in the wainscot.

"Here's mud!" I cried, twisting my skewer out

and scattering a shower of plaster; and then had to stop and explain the idiom.

We started gaily, thinking those first steps, digging a hole through our wall and then on through theirs, would be nothing at all, but, say, when it comes to manual labor that kind of thing takes quite some time. The farther we got the quieter we had to go. Hour after hour we scraped and pried, softly loosening a brick at a venture, and then another and so on, being 'specially cautious towards the end that sounds might not penetrate. We weren't exactly sure of our surface, and while not expecting secret springs and deep set cupboards in an outer ramification, you never can tell what these robber barons will contrive — our game was to move slowly lest a whizzing and a buzzing and dodging doors, if not police alarms, should throw our actions open to a most unsympathetic world. We wanted to steer clear of cupboards and all other obstacles, for theft had no part or lot in the scheme — at least not a drug theft. Like wise men of old we sought knowledge, and our object was to come up with the back of the neighbor's carved woodwork. I calculated pieces might be carefully cut away there to afford eye holes, and a listening chink, though hearing anything from such a position would be no cinch.

Griggs was a scream all through — that delayed the work too. It was a "bally funny" occupation for one so nifty. I laughed to see him going into the dirty job with as great gusto as a truant mixing mud pies. Gloves preserved his manicure, but a white shirt, and silk hose and patent pumps aren't a first class brickpicker's costume; they got the worst of the

bout and then, of course, it was too late to do any good. He was a sight, a mess of lime, his round face extraordinarily red, and perspiration streaming from every pore.

Between laughing and looking I guess I left him to do most of the manual — odd how soon work grows monotonous; a year of Sundays seemed to pass before we struck it soft, and Howard muffled my triumphant squeal in his glove.

"Jove, you mustn't wake the blighters! Come out of the cave and talk. How do I look?"

He commenced dusting at himself here and there, dabbing at shoulders and knees like a birdie preening its plumes.

"You look fierce," I chirped. "But we're on the boards sure enough. Take a lung-full and then we'll go to it and see what we can see."

I switched on our electric torch, but it failed to reveal any clue to the relative position of our neighbor's mouldings. No little ridges or seams, such as I had hoped for, no cracks, just beautiful planed light boards, showing the traces of what had been Jacobs's wall, and now lay in a neat pile behind us.

"We're treed! — I might have known that fine stuff would be backed flat. What are we going to do now?"

"A bird and a bottle wouldn't be amiss, eh — what?"

"Splendid! But gee! There's a splash on the dashboard. I mean we'll have to clean up."

"Right oh! I very often have to conjecture what you do mean, Miss Clarissa, owing to your command of the great American language."

I laughed. "Then let's descend to simple prose. 'Use Sapolio.' But what's the good of quoting to a man who's not familiar with the national classics? That's from a series of bully street-car ads. They created quite an intellectual stir — nobody's been able to decide yet whether Shakespeare or Bacon wrote 'em."

"Ah — I'm afraid I never ride in trams."

"You miss one of the freest gifts of life — American art instinct is focused on the pictorial advertisement. We can't call a taxi here, so let's walk out to Madison Avenue and take a car down to the hotel. Mixing with the proletariat will help us to think, anyway."

We tidied each other up as much as possible and didn't look unlike the rest of the world, as we boarded a green one and dropped our nickels at the door.

"Behold! Your education is about to begin."

While he adjusted his monocle, I ran the line of ads over, and my eye fastened on a demonstration of a new-fangled suction cleaner for mouldings, carvings, etc.

"Golly!" cried I, almost pinching Griggs. (Think of being that intimate with a real swell! It goes to show what a leveler honest labor is.) "Do you see the painted houri up there manipulating a Gadfly on a Louis quince chair from A. & S's. Farther on — near the middle. She solves our problem — or at least she carries us half way."

"Bally poor drawing," was his first comment.

"Listen! I'm going to operate one like him in our neighbor's smoking room."

"How do you know Jacobs has one?"

"Don't know — hope he hasn't. I'm going to sell him one, and then I'm going to demonstrate — personally conducted tour for a flabby financier. I'm going to act as an agent of that firm."

Howard stared at me open mouthed. "But you aren't an agent, eh — what?"

"I'm off to apply for the job to-morrow morning. Watch me!"

"Do you think they — ah, they'll take you on?"

"Take me on!" I laughed, thinking privately of the trepidation with which I had approached Bain & Dingley. "If they don't we'll buy the firm. I never was so set on anything in all my life as on that suction cleaner."

After all I didn't have to buy the blooming company out. Gadflies sold on commission. I entered my name, paid a guarantee for the sample and sallied forth. It was then too late for business, so I hustled around and looked up a suitable costume, and next morning I lay for the man of the house and nailed him coming out.

Clarissa isn't bad looking, and she had spent money to dress the part; also she has a way, when she wants, of getting her hooks into people. Jacobs fell for me and made an appointment to have the thing demonstrated at his office.

I knew there wouldn't be enough carving in any office in New York city to give my pet what I considered a fair trial, but gently does it, a step at a time. I turned up on the minute, wearing a sweet timid smile, and an earnest innocent air — selling a cleaner was so very important to the poor little girl, she would almost have done anything to sell her first machine.

Easy as shooting fish in a barrel. Jacobs fell for me harder than ever. He crashed. And when I'd played around with him a little, I asked straight out if there wasn't any carved furniture, or any place in his house where I could really show him the wonders of the Gadfly, and prove its value. Of course his mind jumped at once to the ornate seclusion of that Chinese room. My words had suggested, as nearly as I dared, just such a spot. He hummed and hawed a bit, finally appointing me to go and clean the smoking room in his home next morning. I was to be sure to turn up at nine o'clock, before he left for the office, so that he could show me the place himself.

"Yes, sir," I answered meekly, for as a mere agent I wasn't guessing how elaborate those decorations were. And then I tripped away along his double avenue of clerks, and flew into the nearest telephone booth to bellow my success at Griggs.

Lordy! What a chance! All day alone there and working right over the spring! Success! The scheme had prospered beyond our wildest expectation. I marvelled at the man running a risk of discovery, or a risk of damage to the delicate mechanism. But I had to learn about Jacobs from him.

Next day he escorted me directly into the L room, and, take it from me, I was mightily relieved. The old lady with the tipsy figure 8 had looked the caterer's people well over, and some of these madames have memories like a boss Free Mason. She might have placed me even in my piquant disguise, and she would certainly have spotted the price of those simple and vastly becoming clothes — maybe have subtracted them from Jacobs's income — I thanked my lucky stars

that his family were the happy kind that lie blissfully unconscious of crimes on their own doorstep until eleven thirty A. M.

I hadn't gone into the details with Griggs, but naturally I expected a joy ride. You can't be a working girl alone in New York without cutting your eye teeth, and my new employer was quite too prompt and too personal to be single-eyed about the little business deal. But I hadn't been looking for his burst of speed — Samuel was no flivver when it came to sentiment — so I nearly suffered a smack from that fat old Jew before I got the speedometer tamed. I come close to kicking myself every time I think of him.

"Over here," he commanded. "I want to show you something."

I crossed the floor slowly, alive to the stupendous fact that we were standing facing his secret, tingling with excitement and revulsion from the presence and nearness of it and him. Only Jacobs, the boss, stood now between me and my object.

As a matter of course he slipped an arm around the little agent and drew her against his great bulk. I twisted from under his fat elbow and sprang behind a chair — the very chair in which Griggs had knelt when he found me sobbing. I was near, tantalizingly near to Mecca — but there was that old woman-eater rising strong as Gibraltar in the foreground.

He laughed and lunged for me, and I sidestepped again, but after a very short spell of puss-in-the-corner he got mad. Winded I guess, too stout to play the game gracefully, and spoiled by getting everything just when he wanted it. The Salamander act — ignoring him and piquing, and tempting him on —

wouldn't have worked with Samuel Jacobs, big powerful brute. If the butler hadn't come knocking at the door, calling out that some person wanted him particularly on the telephone, I'd have been mauled sure. Bah! How I loathed mankind then! But I couldn't split into an open quarrel with the game so close under my hand.

As soon as the host left, I flew to the case where my trusty Gadfly lay, and got it out directly, so that I was hard at work, earnest and innocent and distant against his return. Clarissa was counting on all morning to explore those walls, and she got it — with the icing off the cake though, pretty clean.

Matters downtown must have been pressing. Jacobs left the door open when he came back, and he only buzzed in for a minute.

"Got to go — appointment — sorry — want to show you this." Manner and voice indicated business only. With relief I watched him cross to the wall — THE WALL — and raise his hand. My eyes glued themselves on the spot. Then a horrible thought overwhelmed me: suppose he made me a prisoner — shoved me into the secret chamber and let the old woman pick my bones. I'm no coward, if I do say it, but my knees shook. His fingers rested on the very corner I had banged. But he was talking again, and I had to wrench my wits to attention.

"There are special panels here," he said. "Built in when I bought the house. If you come on them while cleaning, don't call anybody — don't be surprised. You see they spring out so, and you can shut them with a push."

Before my astonished gaze he lightly opened the

door of the first cupboard I had glimpsed, and another beside it. Both closets were absolutely empty!

"Mum's the word, girlie. Do you get me?"

While I yet stood petrified, staring up at the wall, he turned, and placing one finger under my tilted chin, advanced his thick lips. That's where I nearly got off. In a flash hate and chagrin boiled over; I jerked away fiercely angry, showing bared teeth and my honest opinion of the old scoundrel.

"No?" the master hazarded in utmost surprise. "Still haughty. Well, I must be quick. Make a good job of it." And on that he turned and hurried out.

But I wasn't free to walk out. No, sir, I had to stay there and clean the damned room all morning — and not a blooming thing to find — not a paper to peek at!

After my frantic, soul-sweeping disappointment had subsided to a moderate gale of feeling, I was forced to admire the wise old guy taking an outsider into confidence, rather than risk discovery by his household servants. Between gusts I commenced to wonder what the emptiness signified. Had he gone out of the smuggling business?

All the time I kept my fingers busy, for I had a job to do, so that philandering my way into the heart of a deserted citadel could not be counted waste effort. I had armed myself with many sharp, headless steel pins, and pacing off the location of our dug-out behind, I proceeded to drive these clean through the carving, thereby outlining several small wells of the ornament in such a way that they could be cut from the back and surreptitiously removed. I calculated the

center-light in the room would bank darkness against the walls at night and cover our fraud; and I was pleased to note how easily the steel ran into the soft wood; evidently the boarding on our side was only a thin layer and not difficult to cut away.

At noon the Gadfly girl quit for lunch, and you bet she didn't turn up again, either in Jacobs's house or at the head office. Instead, I called for Griggsy and he arranged a condolence party.

If we only could have had parties without women — swell women never failed to introduce the discordant note. One of the doves we met that afternoon wore an ancient and very ugly bracelet which her forty-second grandmother once removed had come by, no doubt quite properly, when she took the washing home to the Duke; and she began putting on side over the *Mayflower* flotilla. Makes me sick! If social America knew more history, it would burn less incense before the Pilgrim Fathers, who were nothing more than earnest working people. We're all bound to have had ancestors, sure thing, an unbroken line on both sides of the family — but if they weren't ripsnorters, what's the sense of blowing about them?

This creature with her high-falutin' talk made me mad and clinched the idea of Aunt Elizabeth's ear-rings. I determined to get them out of pawn, have some bona fide flashers put in, like she had done, and be wearing jewels on the settings of which, at least, my grandmother had cast a spell.

Henri and I are thrifty folk, we'd kept the tail of our eye on the pawn ticket and knew it was just about due, so first convenient moment I hustled round to Second Avenue and interviewed my uncle. I was

so swathed in luxury now it went against the grain to visit slums, and this was the real lowdown shop where I had stored my superfluous garments while trying to make up the Cobalt fare. The dingy shop being full I had to wait my turn. I hate dinge and unwashed humanity, and I hate waiting. I stood by with a pencil and my card, for Henri's utmost efforts failed to make me accurate at figures in my head and I'd been calculating the interest. Impatience made me restless. I began to jab the pencil point into little holes on the counter thinking how I had driven those pins through Samuel Jacobs's woodwork. I noticed the boss observed me and I was suddenly overcome by a shop-girl feeling — real embarrassment at having marked his counter. This set my nerves fidgeting more than ever, but I transferred my high art stunt to the card, and drew a fine full-tailed portrait of Henri's snake. I had grown quite familiar with the sign now, and often amused myself seeing how few strokes I could make him in.

Of course I realized the old reptile must mean a great deal to several people, but hunting for a needle in a haystack wasn't my line. I'd never tried to work him off, and when the head man came to wait on me, I handed over the ticket without a thought.

He gave me one swift, keen, understanding glance, that set my pulses tingling; then proceeded quietly to the back of the shop, opened a drawer here and there, got my things together, apparently all in the regular course of business, but, when those odds and ends were shoved across, he whispered without moving his lips: "Broadway Subway, Union Square, up town."

I eyed him straight before putting the lot into an

dock. Then their business ends. You will speak to no one, notice nothing, but walk at once to a square gray house standing at the end of a row of houses, a little apart, isolated on the dunes, overlooking the sea."

Gosh! Here was dyed-in-the-wool, real old-fashioned melodrama. Until that minute I'd have said the world had outgrown such doings. There was financial romance and plenty to be had if you made it — on the plan of the Lelland mine scoop — but melodrama surely only happened to newspaper men and then had to be colored up for publication.

He stopped abruptly at the house on the sea, and I didn't dare to ask for more — probably I was expected to know the next step.

"I'm going back down town," he said. "You had better take a surface car up." Then he hesitated. "I mistrusted the chief's judgment when I saw you," he hurried on. "But you are most discreet — most — not a single question."

I handed him my best smile without a word, and he stood, hat off, watching me mount the exit stairs with a look of admiration that had nothing to do with business.

To-morrow! To-morrow for the great adventure! Everything was fixed up for me O. K. I had only to proceed according to programme and take in the scenery à la Cook. It never occurred to Clarissa not to go. Griggs enjoyed the supreme triumph of turning on the red lights, tuning up the danger motif and all that. For, of course, I sent at once to my confederate. He was set against the affair from the start, and suggested all sorts of horrors, including sand-

ticks and Chinamen. The last pretty nearly made a freeze out, for there's more love lost between a Frenchman and a Prussian than there is between me and the Celestials.

Seeing "frightfulness" effective, my pal lingered on the thought trying to persuade me. But talking ideas over always makes them familiar, and familiarity breeds contempt, even with fear. Courage righted itself. Soon my imagination began to run on what was likely to happen in that gray house, standing apart, looking out to the sea. I couldn't grow familiar with this idea because of being left guessing.

I stood on the threshold of the house and mystery — to-morrow I would have the chance to solve it. Henri and the woman in me proved too strong for Griggs.

"Nothing doing, Howard!" I cried finally. "Can it. I'm booked for Babylon on the early train — you may come along if you like. But I'll tell you something. I feel so chockful of excitement and curiosity, I'm liable to bust out and be ready for the madhouse between this and that, if I don't get busy and take my mind off their blooming riddle. What's the matter with going up to Jacobs's corner this afternoon and putting in a bit of work. My fingers itch for the knife, and my eyes burn to witness. Let's risk being seen for once. If we work all afternoon, I dare say we can look in on them to-night, and to-night's the night — at least it may very well be. We know the gang are on the war-path; it's the snake gang — Jacobs's gang; and it's more than probable we'll see something worth our while.

CHAPTER XI

"Did you ever feel such a low-down cuss in y life?" I asked, as we climbed the high stoop of Num 17.

"Rather hollow about the spine, isn't it?"

"Hollow! I feel as if the whole universe wa vacuum crystal globe, with me and my criminal int tions in the center, and every Jew alive gazing in read his fortune."

"I feel like a bride and groom," he replied, blush poppy red.

"So long as you feel like the bride too, it lets out," I laughed. "But you're on. This is a sort public confession of complicity. If society could o peep inside at us, how surprised it would be. Y look positively domestic."

We had provided ourselves with huge, blue checl kitchen aprons; and our room by this time resemb an armory or a section of the patent office, bristl with knives and chisels of every size and shape. I we were poor enough workmen to quarrel with t tools, and eager to further a tedious job by empl ing scimitars and two-edged swords.

The space opened through the bricks had narrov considerably from our original margins, and so, wl we began hacking at the boards, we were obliged stand very close together.

"Do you know what we are doing?" asked Hc

ard. "In plain English, we hope to spy — if possible to listen. Romance has its degrading side, eh — what?"

"This is detective work!" I answered indignantly. "We are being very deliberate about it and have gone to a lot of expense and trouble. I guess that squares things on our side. Listening is only despicable when you flop behind a curtain and then tell how many times he kissed her. Savvy?"

"If anybody was listening now, old thing —?"

"There isn't anybody," I said, chiselling away earnestly.

A pause followed. I glanced up, saw his pink face approaching, caught the intention in his eye, and thwarted it.

"Howard Griggs, I forbid you. I've never been kissed, and I'm not going to be till I'm married."

I thought the last word would frighten an Englishman, and it did.

"Women have no modesty — no reticence," he murmured.

"He who hesitates is lost," I murmured back as one disinterested, and then a painful silence hung about us for a year.

"Clarissa," he ventured at last, "I don't believe you will ever be married. You are so like a man in certain ways — business and money affairs — so independent. I don't believe you would stand for a man around."

His words, nearly expressing one of my secret anxieties, caused me to fly at him in amazed indignation.

"I'd like you to understand that Henri de Grasse is nothing to me but wits — not one atom. He hasn't

got a say-so when it comes to other matters — not — not mental. I'd just like to see him butting in on a wedding."

And then I hung on to the wall for support because I realized I had given the whole show away.

Griggs stared. "I don't know who Henri thingumbob is — if it's the chap running your boat, you needn't get so jolly warm about him," he said sulkily, and striking another note, "Can't you understand it's just minds which are so hard to adjust when two persons get — tied up together? Look at me and my niece. If it wasn't for these bally silly notions Angelica takes — lecturing in America and all that — I could settle down and live at Hellingham the year round — or at least I might settle down — settle down —"

He floundered, and I left him to it for his words had set me thinking hard. How much of Clarissa Kendall had gone over to Henri's control, and how much of her could I count on as myself? From the first I had been entirely willing to join forces, to depend on de Grasse. He financed me and amused me, but I wasn't sure I had bargained for him to absorb me. This question of sentiment raised a new issue. When a girl gives the impression of not being able to stand a man around, it's one sure thing the real men won't stand her around unless for her money or her youth — and — puppets! That class ain't good enough for Granny's girl. If I wanted a man I wanted a MAN; and if I wanted a husband and family now was the time to snatch them — but did I want them? Was I content to chase adventure with Griggs and buy roses from Lilly Love?

Stalled! Brought up short. And almost thrown into the ditch!

It was perfectly true. We had been ordering flowers twice a day from the beautiful blonde at the corner. And before he discovered her my hands were manicured at the same table every morning for a month; and before that it was a waitress. Lord deliver us! Where was Henri leading me?

"Clarissa," said I to myself solemnly. "You'll cut a fine figure flirting with the chickens in your middle age. You've driven Henri on the snaffle much too long. I begin to suspicion de Grasse is some dark horse — but maybe it's only his nature. Anyway, whatever is his nature is apt to be your second nature, so mind and keep it second. Take warning and get busy."

By five o'clock we finished thinning the boards that backed our neighbor's decoration; and commenced whittling out the pieces I had marked. Although seemingly so simple it was desperately difficult for us, and occupied every faculty. If any person had chosen to sit in the smoking room next door just at that hour, we must surely have been discovered, for a whole orchestra of gnawing rats could hardly have got away with the sound of our scraping. I doped out the thickness of the boards by pulling one of the steel pins through and measuring it to the rest, and when we had cleaned the wood down to a thin shell, we fixed this pin in the center of our little island, and very carefully cut the remaining quarter inch.

"Your fingers are smaller," said Griggs, wiping his brow. And it was up to me to lift the plug from our first peep-hole.

The immediate sensation was like a blow in the face, until we remembered a back room would naturally at this hour be shrouded in darkness, and that not seeing is no proof of not being able to see. I put my finger through and felt the surface of the ornament, and reassured of an entirely clear opening, we whaled in on a general destruction scheme. For it was better to cut separate eyeholes than to attempt sharing one.

At seven we sneaked out for a sandwich and returned, still hungry, to lie in wait. Both had forgotten the tiff of the afternoon. Thieves have got to be good pals or quit cold. I can't imagine anything needing stricter harmony than grovelling shoulder to shoulder on a crackman's job, eating together in side streets, creeping in through unlighted hallways, and holding hands in the dark as we did from sheer excitement, and partly to still the beating of our hearts when we saw what we saw.

The door opened suddenly, a brilliant oblong showed beyond the curtains; two figures entered and Jacobs strode across and switched on the lamp, casting a pool of light in the center of the room and clothing the wings with darkness. The other man had once joshed his host about a pretty waitress. I whispered the fact to Griggs.

They sat a long time talking and drinking; sometimes they argued, but we failed to catch a word though we applied our ears to the slots. My companion showed signs of boredom, but Henri was simply boiling with excitement.

The butler appeared, spieled his piece, and disappeared. And a moment later there was ushered into the room with due pomp and ceremony, an erect, hand-

some, stately, elderly woman — Lady Angelica Deering as sure as there are pearly gates above!

I clutched Howard in a silent spasm and he shook me off as if I'd bitten him.

"Jove!" I heard him murmur. "Jove!"

His relative sat down quietly and joined in the conversation. Jacobs seemed set on making her do something, and the other chap on her not doing it — at least on not making her do it against her will. The argument between them waxed fast and furious, but the lady never budged. We could see her saying the same words over and over again. Not a sentence did we hear till the little fellow grabbed Samuel by the sleeve, and dragged him over towards us, urging his point in private.

They stood right under the paneling, and we clapped our ears on to listen madly intrigued.

"Put the whole thing off," the man said. "We haven't any one to take her place. We daren't risk it."

"Too late now — arrangements are all made."

I could imagine Jacobs shaking his bull head, and the veins on his neck swelling.

"She won't go till Wednesday — I doubt if she goes then. She funks it."

"I'll funk her!" he growled. "Send the youngster down to-morrow. The police are getting wise to us, and we want to make good this haul."

("It's the same gang — my gang!" I whispered, dry mouthed, to Griggs. But he was far beyond speech.)

"You're wrong, Jacobs. Better lie low, keep the kid out of it, and let the old lady get her nerve back.

She's the smartest woman we've ever worked with, and she deserves some consideration. Murder's murder — a nasty job. It wouldn't pay her to get the hounds on her trail right now. I doubt if her family even could do much."

Jacobs bit the end off a cigar. We heard his teeth grind, and he snarled:

"Nerves! Didn't I hide her here! How long does she want to recover from a bit of a jar? Mind you, if she shot de Grasse, it don't pay us to work with her any longer. Murder will out, and we aren't so particular to have the dogs barking up our trees neither. I can't throw her down; but this is a darned good chance to quit.

"Bah!" he added after a moment's pause. "I don't believe it. Any woman who would funk the beach job hasn't got pluck enough for shooting. Better send her on a lecture tour."

Silence followed.

I felt so bad for Griggs I daren't look at him, but just draped myself around that peep-hole and kept on spying till the three of them went away. Then I had to face about.

The boy was pacing the floor with arms folded and his round countenance ashy.

"I've got to know more of this," was all he said.

As a relation the shoes pinched, and being guardian hung her medals around his own neck. It was horrid. Thinking of him in the dock witnessing against his very flesh and blood gave me the creeps exactly as if we'd been handling real bones instead of unearthing a family skeleton. And right there and then I offered to let the whole business slide. But the Eng-

lish aren't snifflers. He wanted to know, and he meant to know. Jacobs had worse than a barking dog to deal with when Howard turned serious over a question of their honor.

CHAPTER XII

Following a gray evening the morning broke gloriously golden; I knew all about it from the start, being awake early, that is, not having slept. And true to the adage, when we, the travellers, reached port, rain was descending on our heads in a steady methodical fashion, looking good for a week's pour.

Griggs had come down on the same train, but not with me, fearing possible espionage. He hated like poison to let a girl walk into the trap alone, but they expected a young woman, and beggars can't be choosers — much less detectives. It was catch as catch can for us.

Talk about cold feet! I never experienced such a sinking as when I stepped on to that bleak platform, and in one swift glance saw my only ally get out two cars ahead, and walk off without so much as a twist of his neck. We had arranged he would dodge into the station, hire anything in sight, and follow the automobile marked "Millbrook"; but I didn't think of all this carefully devised counter-plot, as I stood alone, crushed by that uncompromising sky. Jimminy Crickets! No! The sinking feeling dominated every thought.

I was wet, cheerless, in a blue funk, and felt a perfect ninny of helplessness, not having an umbrella, and very much like indulging in a regular cry, a dangerous mood lasting while we drove through the town streets,

mostly obscured by rain, miles along a winding road, and out to the sea. From the instant of placing my foot in the car I was lost. A sunless heaven makes direction guesswork; and I soon gave up counting the turns and corners. But of one thing I was firmly convinced: we could not have embarked at Babylon unless the driver acted with intention to blind me, which, as he took me for one of the gang, seemed futile.

A silly refrain from an English song kept humming through my head:

> "How many miles to Babylon —
> Shall we get there and back again?"

The grim suggestion in the last line annoyed me less than the lack of rhyme. I thought of the Terrier and his poetry. Memory flashed to other and wilder outings; strange larks in Cobalt, reckless rides, the dark interior of mines. And that night when Pepper Pot and I had fled to the Victoria. My spirits began to rise. After all it wasn't Clarissa Kendall of the Ritz Hotel, lapped in luxury and chilled by the inclemency of weather, who was on this job; but the winner of the Lelland Mine, undertaking another desperate gamble. Here's to us, Henri!

Soon I shed my last tremors in the bustle of being conveyed from our automobile, and in observing dock, boatman and the lay of the land with mind alert for clues. Nowhere on all the flat landscape stretching behind did I glimpse Griggs or his car. He was playing it safe; but I had faith he would hang on their tracks like a British bulldog.

With a purr of engines the two strangers and I

forged forth into that silent void, where gray heaven and gray sea lapped one upon the other, meaningless, offering no guidance. The rain continued falling, heavier and more uncomfortable than mist, yet lacking the dignity of a smashing storm — just miserable wet rain. I sat for an hour in the back of the open boat, wrapped in oilskins, my feet in a puddle, the water sloshing about. We made slow progress steering through the bank of cloud, with never a perspective to lead from buoy to buoy, and the devil of a weedy bottom fingering us.

Gradually the ghost of a lighthouse loomed out of trailing moisture, and then a row of blots — a pencil of darkness on the horizon — the bar itself. Blobs of color took form as cottages, and finally a wharf showed its gray streak against brown grasses. We were there. They pointed out the roof of the house on the dunes and my heart beat like a trip-hammer — what would happen?

My guides, philosophers and friends, promptly settled themselves on a packing case under a shed roof spanning the lower end of the dock, and sought liquid comfort from a good-sized bottle. Their orders were to wait and they gave me the up and down wondering why I hung around.

For once in her life Clarissa yearned to be a Bayman, to smoke a dirty pipe and linger swopping yarns with another human being — and then she turned to face the lions.

Board walks, built level over the rolling ground drifted with sand, or wind swept above the tops of stark bushes, stretched slippery and uninviting in both directions. My way led to the shore and eastward.

Slowly I footed it past the backs of a row of summer homes, standing now with all eyes blinded, and their hospitable souls turned inward. At the end of the row civilization made one valiant effort with a few loose planks and stopped abruptly. I must choose either to scramble through deep soft sand, overgrown by scrub, or climb the dunes to the beach. And I chose the dunes. How splendid and desolate they looked lying seaward, a lumpy line of unfriendly, tousel-haired giants crouching asleep. Coarse fringes of grass along their spines moved in a breath of wind. Did you ever see a beast twitch its skin while dreaming? Those hummocks looked so alive I dreaded to wake them. Shivering weakness flowed through me — I wanted to run. I did turn, but the moment was too cowardly even for flight. What if the men in the boat spotted my funk and refused to take me off?

Between the devil and the deep blue sea I chose the sea; and as soon as I placed my heel on the neck of the first monster, and caught the air and the sound of open water, I could have gone to the under world without battin' an eye. Only I was hungry and very wet.

There stood the gray house, farther back from the shore than the others, and almost hidden among the dunes. Though the front door and windows boarded up put it in the same class as the closed cottages, I found a little puff of smoke rising from the chimney and cut across to the back. The roll and crash of a dead-swell surf obliterated minor sounds, but I thought as I knocked that a snatch of song, drunken and ribald, floated by.

I knocked again and again, each time more loudly,

and at last drummed with both fists. The ground fell away toward the rear of the house. I was standing on a high veranda which must in season have been a kind of summer kitchen. Rags of faded mosquito netting hung on rusty nails; dirty cloths littered the floor; the whole place looked rotten. I had knocked my knuckles sore and was at my wits' end for the next move, when a grating and shuffling below made me double over the banister, peering underneath the open steps.

A rough sailor-like head was thrust cautiously out of what might be called the cellar door, opening hard on the sand.

Crusty but kind, I doped him.

The old fellow laid his fingers on his lips as though warning me, and beckoned. I slipped quietly down and around. We stood inside a dark foundation built out of rough planks nailed on posts, and lighted only through their gaping edges where diagonal pieces had broken away. Old clothes were rammed into crevasses in the floor, but they did not prevent the sand from drifting and piling itself through the gaps. A row-boat, bottom side up, with ropes, buckets and a confusion of sea gear filled one-half, the rest being given over to cases of booze.

"Not hard to tell which side you're on," I said, nodding toward the fishing nets, and I knew at once the old man was pleased with even so little attention.

"You're the lass as is to come for the package?" he asked, eyeing me keenly.

And I, scared of giving my ignorance away, mumbled some assent.

"Then I'd not anither time. This is no place for

the bonny likes of you," he remarked calmly, preparing to lead the way upstairs.

Cripes! If I couldn't bluff that old top, how was I going to fare with the rest of the bunch!

We mounted directly to the kitchen where the heat of a wood stove, a strong smell of stale fish, and singing mingled with the clink of glass made my senses reel. Something very very must be afoot. I trembled with apprehension.

"Come thy ways in," said the sailor, indicating a chair. "That is 'gin you're no afraid," he added, a gleam of humour livening his watery blue eyes, as a burst of filthy language interrupted the song.

"They're uncu' rough. It was na so when the muckle woman came hersel'. She held them a' in hand."

Excitement coursed in my veins for the last question of being on Jacobs's track vanished in his reference. Who could the "muckle woman" be but Angelica Deering, or the woman who was impersonating her? — Poor Griggsy!

I would have pushed right in, but he motioned me aside.

"Bide ye here, lass. He's cursing for his drink." And twining his gnarled fingers about the necks of ten or a dozen bottles, the old chap walked off, through an adjoining room into the main den.

I followed hot-foot, keen to see without being seen; and, hiding behind a flimsy cretonne drape, took a slant at the enemy's position.

Gee! The heart of that home was in worse disorder than its extremities — some show! The furniture, any old cast-off thing, set the scene cheaply, and the

actors seemed to me more punk than their surroundings. A dirty table, spattered and littered, occupied the middle; and beyond it, with glass raised as though proposing a toast, wavering slightly on his feet, stood the horse-faced man — the very man I had seen a year before closeted with Jacobs in his elegant apartment counting powders. Another fellow had flung himself on the couch, partly on top of a woman's coat and a feathered hat, and in this discomfort lay snoring. The owner of the tawdry plumes, dead to their destruction, slumped sidewise on a wooden seat, paying no heed to either of her companions. She was plump, badly over dressed — and a Gentile. Quantities of untidy red hair set off a puffy white skin, while the unhealthy leer of fast living bespoke her station.

Caruso emptied his glass and attempted to toss it behind him, but the throw miscarried. The common heavy tumbler flying from his uncertain hand like a shot out of a gun hit the woman. It fell unharmed and rolled along the floor. No one troubled to pick it up. The hussy understood this as a playfully intentional stroke and glared at her tormentor; then rousing she pulled her dress above her fat white knee, and embracing her leg, twisted to inspect the damage.

The man laughed. She spat back at him. It shaped awfully like a row.

I quit, crept noiselessly out to the kitchen, and was pretending to warm myself when the sailor returned.

Sounds of the gathering quarrel stormed upon us.

"Ay, they're savage," he commented. "It's the baggage. The master's that way wi' his women." And suddenly he burst out against them, shaking his clenched fist.

" It's easy laffin' but ye'll laff t'ither side o' ye ugly faces one day. Ye muckle liar, ye stammering stirk, ye owd addle egg! 'Twill nob'but serve ye right, I'm thinking.— I've tholed mair fra him, lass, than I ever thoct to thole from any man."

I knew from the whimper in the last words that he had been drinking too.

A gust of oaths, a female voice crying, fear and malignity in its tone, warned me to let them be. So I waited for the hymn of hate sung as duetto.

The pleasant family muttered itself quiet at last, and my custodian gave me the next cue.

" The package lies on the dresser, it's a' ready, but ye'll ha' to be gaein' for it yersel'. They'd no ha' me touch the danged writin'."

" What's it all about? " I asked casually, thinking in his present mood he might split on them. But I had underestimated the old fox. A shrewd, suspicious glance met mine. Our eyes measured each other, and his fell sulkily.

" I'm sworn to say nowt," he replied.

And I understood whatever the pressure of his service, or his grudge against the " Master," of Jacobs's business he knew less than nothing. All at once I decided on action. I walked quickly into the anteroom and threw the curtains wide, seeking with such positive action to ground and steady my nerves, for their gentle entertainment had got my goat.

Red-head had joined the other hog in drunken slumber. The horse-faced man sat alone in a shuttered twilight playing patience. He pushed back as I entered.

" Ah — so it's a pretty devil! "

The blood flamed into my face at his insolence, and speech came like a whistle of icy air through clenched teeth.

"Have you the paper ready? You've been a long time rowing here — and my men are waiting."

How I summoned the grit to be high-handed with him beats me, but I had struck the right note. His face clouded, his dignity dropped to the level of a kid disgraced and chided.

"How d'ya mean rowin'?"

"Give me the papers," I said evenly.

He looked up and smiled, blinking his eyes slowly as though seeking a clearer brain and clearer vision.

"You almost put it over, Dew-Drop. I thought for a minute it was the old woman. Come here!" reaching his hand across. And as I did not move, adding pettishly, "Don't stand staring at me. Come in — or get out!"

Although my host spoke glib English his accent smacked of the Fatherland, and the recent exhibition of his gallantry to our gentle sex didn't excite any wild longing to be bombarded with his style of bouquets. A few whirling beer bottles liven the scene, no doubt, but I prefer quiet. From the minute he first spoke I had only one idea — to make a safe getaway with or without the package. I stuck to the errand simply because I judged taking the swag with me would be the surest and shortest cut to safety. Remember, if not walking in darkness I was at least talking in the dark. Facts shrouded themselves from me in a terrible mental fog, through which light filtered sparingly as he talked. I knew he had almost come to terms at mention of the old dame, and calculated maybe a hint of

the power behind the throne would bring him into line. At best I threw it out as a feeler.

"Jacobs —" I began, and stopped appalled.

Black fury sprang in him. His open palm whacked on the table, scattering his game pell-mell.

"Damn Jacobs! Nothing but Jacobs! I'd like to know who's boss of this gang? Who'd send a peach-faced gosling butting in here but a fool like Jacobs? I suppose you'll get up on your high horse, eh, and tell me you're his girl. Hands off, eh? So — it's hands off all round. Jacobs went against our advice in sending you down. Go back and tell him so, and see what a glad hand he gives you. Ha, ha! I know the weaknesses of Samuel Jacobs. Nobody's going to double-cross me. You don't get any papers — not this trip, my Honey Dew!"

I was in about as bad as I could be and without a notion of the way out. Something told me that to take him at his word and try to break away would bring destruction rattling about my ears. I prayed then. There are moments when frail humanity has no other resource. I prayed to the spirit likeliest to send direct and immediate help. In those electric seconds I fell back hard on Henri, and felt him rise to the occasion overpoweringly. He dominated me. Ours was no longer a case of two minds animating one body, but of one mind — Henri's mind. He obsessed me all right. He took complete possession. If there is such a thing as "manifestation" — a spook assuming the form and features of the dead — I believe at that moment de Grasse came as near to doing it as the spiritual law allows. Whether he worked some temporary illusive change in me, or just wrapped me in an envelope

of ghostly tissues evoked from astral space, I shall never know, there not having been a mirror handy. But I should worry — the effect proved potent on a drink-disordered mind. To the man opposite I must have assumed literally the face and voice of Henri, otherwise how account for the happenings of the next ten minutes? My own mind still retained a conscious hold, enough to note the conversation; but the smile on my face was de Grasse's smile and the words issuing from my lips were not even English as I slid into a seat facing my angry host and, folding my arms, leaned confidently toward him.

"Felix, you've got a bee in your bonnet about old Jacobs — and if you two quarrel it's going to cost us much money."

The stranger ran a hand over his brow, gazing at me stony-eyed.

"Henri!" Gott in Himmel! — Oh, fudge! The jade must have doped my drink! But you called me Felix."

"Have it your own way, and get down to brass tacks. The police are on — partly. The local police I mean are on to this side game — the smuggling business. So Jacobs is rushing to make this last haul good. When we've cashed in on this lot, we'll rest while the smoke evaporates — but from what I know we haven't a day to waste."

"Yes. And how long does the stuff lie in Jacobs's place before he hands over? Where are we when the time comes? Difficult to get a look in, eh — and he'll make it more difficult. He'll make sure of the swag and then let our own particular bull-dog loose — the bureau is restless too. He knows we'd be too busy

covering our tracks to make any claims. No, I don't trust Jacobs."

"He don't let anything loose, I tell you — because he don't know anything. Why, his mind's as innocent of the big thing as a new born babe's."

"H — m. Are you certain? You know what happens to our service when a leak's spotted — the long arm smites from some unexpected quarter."

"What leak are you talking about?" Henri fired this at him quickly, intending to surprise his secret, but the man called Felix only laughed sneeringly.

"Places, rendezvous — the chain. Don't hoodwink yourself; it's more than enough if they ever get wise — and dear knows what the old lady may have said, she was off her chump after de Grasse's murder. Where am I at?" He ran his hand over his head in a dumfounded sort of way, gazing at Henri as though he couldn't believe his eyes. I don't blame him; to be looking at a person, talking to him, telling him about his own death would mix the sanest of us.

Henri lighted a cigarette cool as a cucumber and then picked a soiled pack from the table and began toying with the cards. "Pal," I said, "either you or I are wrong about Jacobs — I'll play you for the stake."

"Three hands of draw."

"And if I win I take the papers."

He nodded and we sat square. The light being dim, filtered by the boarding on the front windows I could almost feel him watching us as I dealt.

The first fell to him, for Henri has a generous skill in these matters, and the second to us. My friend Felix insisted on opening a new pack for the last hand; and while he was about it brought the papers over and

laid our stake temptingly between us. His moving around waked the woman. She sat up, rubbed sleep away from badly bloated eyes, and yawned; and after she had got the focus stared at me. But she was too well trained to break in on his game. The room remained in absolute stillness.

"A pair of twos beats ace, king," I said, reaching for the papers.

And to my amazement he made no demur; only asked cordially, raising the bottle: "How do you take it — the same?"

I was shivering from exposure and nerve strain, and mighty glad to accept, even though the woman rose and joined us, demanding a nip. He scowled.

"Who were you playing with?" I heard her ask as I left.

"Henri de Grasse," came the prompt answer.

"Quit your kidding! De Grasse is planted safe enough — I ought to know. Who's the skirt?"

"Skirt," he repeated, dazed. "It was Henri's manner, and Henri's luck — and she called me Felix — nobody ever called me Felix — nobody cared —"

The girl laughed coarsely. "You're drunk, so you are, can't tell a man from a woman!" adding in a terribly amorous voice, "You're drunk — Felix."

"Take that," he cried. "And leave! Do you hear? Get out — I'm through!"

"Oh, cut the comedy stuff! Who'll cook your victuals if I clear?"

A sound of blows followed. I made a wild dash past the old sailor snoring beside the stove, and down and out and away to an open place of decency and safety.

CHAPTER XIII

Of course I removed the worst stains and ironed out the story a bit for Howard — I had no call to wallow — and as it was he threatened to go stale on the whole business. Didn't approve of my being exposed and all that, and wanted to conduct his family investigation while leaving the smuggling out. I couldn't see where he was going to get off, both charges being up to Angelica, but one can't rub disgrace in like a soothing oil, so I muffled the mouth organ and we arrived in New York without anything being decided.

I had saved the package to open in my own room, for now I had seen my confrères at home, I wasn't too sure what ghastly secret it might contain, or how frightful the nature of the job. Several wrappers, tied and retied, and an oiled silk I painstakingly removed before reaching the heart of the matter, and then, behold a letter — more directions — and a large gold ring, a signet, with the winged snake cut in reverse.

I looked inside the windings again to see if there was a child's rubber along. Would you believe it? That darned twin incubus haunted me so! And then I examined the ring. It showed no sign of opening or hidden poison chamber, and for all I could find was an honest, solid piece of engraved metal; probably their token and guarantee in the delivery of goods, the linchpin of their commerce — what commerce? Smug-

gling, I believed, with murder on the side. We were getting in neck deep too. What was the prize, why did Henri want to stick to it, and would anybody believe I was a self-appointed detective if the goods were found on me?

My head hummed with a dozen disquieting fears as I picked up the letter; but the directions being immediate and imperative drove everything else from mind. I phoned Howard to come over at once, as he stood; hustled on a serviceable plain dress, and was waiting for him downstairs when he breezed along.

"Jove! Are you going in for it?" he exclaimed, after digesting the contents of the closely typed letter.

"Sure. What do you take me for? A busted flush?"

"But — to Canada. It's a bally long chase this time. And you aren't given any idea of later developments."

"They work on a close mouthed system," I laughed. "Advance a step and ask for light."

"You oughtn't to go, and I don't see how you can go — on a moment's notice."

"Pooh-pooh! Don't borrow false comfort. There's no trouble at all. Toronto is almost next door. Leave at eight and arrive in the morning — only one night. What does it matter where one sleeps?"

"Hot stuff, the way you Americans run about. Dashing across the continent and back, plunging into a long journey without a second thought."

"Who crossed the ocean to shoot birdies?" I reminded. But he was unconvinced.

"Clarissa, you ought not — really. It's a rum

crowd to be mixed up with — for a girl," he added, flushing and paling as he thought of Angelica. "Why not consult one of these detective fellows? Give him all our information, wind him up, keep him going — don't you know — pay him to look sharp —"

"Rot!" I cut in, fairly provoked. "That's where you English miss life. Always paying people to do things that are fine fun to do yourselves — gardening, for instance, and breaking horses. If you think we're going to loosen up on this adventure now, you don't know Henri!"

He gave me a startled, wounded look. "Who in Christmas is Henri?"

"Nobody," I said, with a hollow sort of laugh. recollecting how he had crowded me out yesterday. "Henri is a nickname I have for myself — my wild self. You're only acquainted with part of me, Howard." I was cursing my glib tongue.

"But why Henri?" he persisted, so visibly anxious and upset over this strange, intimate male, I suddenly determined to tell him the rights of my story.

"Look here," I said rather breathless. "If you'll promise to treat the question seriously, not to howl, or jeer, or show that you think me stark mad — I'll tell you a mountain of a secret — all about Henri."

"Are you engaged, Clarissa?" he asked, just like that.

I roared. "Yes, I am engaged, but it has nothing to do with the story except as a time limit. I'm engaged to start on a fresh adventure about seven o'clock. I'm off to Toronto to nose out opium, and, if I'm not to miss the train, let's eat."

"You have no business to go alone."

"Why not come along then?" The idea staggered him into gasping apology.

"I — we couldn't do it at home, you know!"

My courage needing a bracer after the happy little party in the house on the dunes, I was more than glad to welcome company, so I pressed him. "Who'll be the wiser anyway? Tell your valet to keep quiet. Pretend to have a cold or something and be staying in. We'll return day after to-morrow or the next day."

"Jolly awkward for you if it came out!"

He was so very, very pink now and so very, very nice I almost hugged him.

"Lordy! Who cares! Nobody's watching me as close as that. Be a sport. Come along, Griggsy. Be a sport!"

"I'll dine with you, if you'll tell me about Henri," he said, begging a decision.

The great oval of the Ritz ceiling softly illuminated, brooded over a vast expanse of waiting emptiness. Seated by our lone under one protective edge of the raised gallery, and watching our waiter's back vanish in long perspective amid tables and chairs, we enjoyed a sensation akin to the privacy of the Sahara desert, and yet I hesitated.

Now it had come to the point of speech I felt nervous and genuinely shy about explaining Henri — almost as though he did occupy the tender relationship Griggs obviously anticipated. We sparred a while with indifferent topics till the soup was served, and my vis-à-vis dropped into the silence best expressing his receptive mood. If we were to get through the tale at all, Clarissa must speak lively. I determined to treat this thing in an airy manner, but in spite of

my utmost effort seriousness weighted the opening words.

"You were present when I first encountered Henri — and his other name is de Grasse."

Then in a few sentences I carried Howard back to the afternoon of the séance, and as clearly as possible pictured my strange experience. I have never before or since seen any one so stirred — so thrilled. Griggs not only grasped the situation at once, but enlarged upon it. He bolted with the bit in his teeth.

"This explains you — this explains you! I have always wondered —"

And such remarks flung from rash heights of gullibility, began to make me a trifle uneasy. Was I such a freak?

He counted my relations with de Grasse of most vital importance, and spoke of writing instantly to certain scientific big-wigs. Wanted to have the condition published in scientific papers; wanted to have me interviewed, perhaps experimented on — no, of course, not quite that, but the same thing.

Nix for little Clarissa. I commenced to feel about as happy as a pup living next door to the Rockefeller Institute.

"Write what you will," I gave permission. "But lacking dates, mind, and no names mentioned. I won't stand for interviewing, or examination, or microscoping — Henri has a prejudice against folks getting too familiar."

I was joshin' to rarefy the atmosphere, but he took it dead serious.

"Perhaps you — and he — feel so now, but in time, Clarissa, I trust you will both realize of what tremen-

dous value this is to Science. A position so unique sets your price above rubies — separates you from your kind. Your kind, indeed. Where are they to be found? You and he no longer belong to the rank and file. It is stupendous — stupendous! I must write to Sir Herbert — I must tell Angelica —"

He broke off short.

"Rave on. But don't tell anybody," I admonished. "It's not your funeral." And we ate in silence for a time.

At last Griggs raised his head and regarded me with a determined eye.

"Clarissa, I am going north — that is, if you will permit it."

"Good business!" I cried, more than delighted. "I knew you'd see me through, old pal. I knew you wouldn't drop for old Grundy!"

"It is — not a question of form — now," he faltered. "Henri's presence — your recent confidence alters everything. I feel it would not be right to allow you to proceed alone and unprotected on — on this wild goose chase. What use are a few miserable dollars, more or less, in the pockets of the American government! Jove! Clarissa, you can't imperil the chances of this research, perhaps the most important research ever conducted, for the sake of catching a bunch of smugglers red-handed. I know you don't understand yet — don't appreciate your own consequence. But I beg of you to be careful. Until such time as you awaken to the vital interest in these facts permit me, my dear girl, to constitute myself a — a sort of guardian —"

That was too rich altogether!

"Angelica and me!" I shouted, limp with mirth. "Wow! You mayn't know it, Griggsy, but you're taking on a tandem. One's sprinting after the other now — and Henri's hot under his collar."

He couldn't help laughing, but he meant every word he had said, all the same.

In the train I had time to explain to Griggs how I doped out Henri's conversation with the man Felix. They were evidently co-criminals in a world series of major and minor crimes; on one hand smuggling with Jacobs; on the other, leaders or operators for some big organization —"the bureau"— probably a foreign bureau, else why had they fallen into familiar foreign talk? I understood now why Henri had been ashamed to take me into confidence and had made me a sort of detective trailing his evil nature.

Griggs proved immensely interested and helpful. He vowed their principal must be the secret service, for it indeed reached with an almighty long arm. The thought both eased and damped his spirits.

If they were secret service agents, then the woman he was after might really be Angelica — even Lady Deering could be almost honorably involved for her government.

But the old woman at Jacobs's, I reminded him, had been up to her neck with them in both games.

Then he fell back on his first argument, that it couldn't be his niece at all but just some one disguised to look like her. And I suggested perhaps they had been putting one over on the lady too. Well, if it was Angelica, it must be secret service. So we reasoned in circles and finally went to bed to hum the argument over on the rail ends all night long.

CHAPTER XIV

Arriving in Toronto I knew the ropes and took command, detailing Howard to taxi straight to the King Edward Hotel and await my return in that mezzanine palm room from where I had spied Charley Ross.

The address on Yonge Street, given in the thief's schedule, turned out to be a prosperous little retail jewelry shop, chiefly consisting of one large window and one small door, with a long counter of show cases running up its interior like a nicely jointed spine. I walked in at exactly the hour appointed, city hall time, and spoke to the only human on deck, a man bending over a high account desk 'way up back. He climbed down from his perch and bustled forward as though to greet a customer. But when I handed over the ring, at once my identification and plausible errand had any one else happened to be in the shop, he said:

"Ah, it is not ze old lady zis time. Welcome mine goota freund," and leaned his arms on the counter smiling unctuously.

"You haf been very busy lately, eh?"

I noticed that his lips did not move, and fascinated by this prison trick, wondering where and when and for what crime opportunity had taught it to him, I lost the sense of the remark and only shrugged.

Fortunately he took the reticence as reproof, murmuring: "We are here quite safe. Bof ze boys are out to zair lunch. But Fräulein is wise — we might

be observed from ze windows. I will ze package immediately bring."

Another package! It wouldn't have taken Jack Johnson to knock me over with a feather. I anticipated starting for China or the North Pole.

The German returned carrying a box about twelve inches long, by five wide, and four deep, neatly done up in paper. A jeweler's parcel which any lady might have escorted from his store without occasioning remark. But he had removed it from a huge safe — a safe proportionately fifty times the size of his regular trade. Doubtless safes are a hobby with some men just as razors are to others.

Old Stutz, for so read the legend over his door, handed the box to me with a considerable flourish, saying, "Ze letter is inside." I must have taken it casually, for a spasm convulsed his florid face, and he whispered, "Fräulein understands the value?"

"Oh, perfectly," I hastened to reply, and as a woman entered the shop, added quickly, "When can I call for my ring?"

How I blessed the native Torontorian in her flat-heeled shoes and rainy-day hat, as I made good my escape. But I couldn't help wondering if she was a bona fide customer, or a detective, or another agent of his foreign policy. One would have fancied, from my cool manner, that I received opium in packages, masquerading as the family spoons, every day; but my feet trod on thin air all the same, and I had walked several blocks in the wrong direction before I collected my scattered wits, and remembered to board a down-town car.

Talk about feeling biggity! I chortled all the way

back over my prowess as a Sherlock Holmes. Report said the police had been sniffing on these tracks for dear knows how long, and hadn't even started a hare — and here I was with the brush. Wasn't I going to show them? With this evidence, and the gang's several rendezvous and dives to name, mine would be a perfectly splendid beat. But maybe it would be more fun to give it to the newspapers instead of the police. Tom could make a nice pot of money out of the scoop, if he handled it properly. I decided to give it to Tom.

Griggs's first exclamation on meeting rather dashed my roseate plans. "Why, how small it is! They can't make any profit on that amount!"

"But opium's awfully valuable," I insisted.

"Yes — in ship loads. Haven't you ever read 'The Wrecker'?"

"Well, maybe there is more to come. Maybe the rest is cached. The directions are inside."

"What! Again! This is growing monotonous, don't you know. Jolly stupid pastime, Clarissa, why not throw it up?"

"We may have to go round the world," I laughed. "Jews have no physical courage. Working over the counter is safe and inconspicuous — but they do follow rather close to form. Suppose you order a bracer while I open the box."

The envelope lay on top. Griggs seized it, and peeped under the lid. One glance was enough to reassure me. There lay the identical mate of Jacobs's black leather cases, looking and bulking so much like the ones in his secret closet.

"We're on!" I crowed. "Let the police locate the cache — good enough job for them, eh? This sample of the dope will serve our turn."

I looked up to meet Griggs's eyes, large and round and troubled.

"Jove! It's bally intricate! Riding around in the middle of the night, with strange men in utterly strange places — and alone — that is without me — without any one you can depend on. I don't sanction your going, Clarissa," he said, handing over the sheet.

I read and frowned. "No mention of a cache, none whatever. I don't see where all the anxiety lies. Don't see what this leads to; don't get why they are so scared and cautious. You or I can sneak this little shrimp of a package through on any train without a qualm. And if the price is no more than you say, one could afford to pay the duty."

"We haven't seen the inside yet. We are jolly ignorant of what it contains. Shall we —"

"Oh, no! Not here! We'd better not look here. Let's go eat and think the matter over."

"Top hole," he replied.

Griggs in his London clothes looked, to the Canadian eye, like easy money, so we were steered over to an excellent table commanding the room from the angle of the great windows. And who should I spy, almost before we were seated, but the Terrier and Bully Bill. I couldn't wait for them to change gears discarding the menu for the middle distance and so pick up my lady-like nod. No, sir-ee. I whirled right across and shook their arms nearly out of joint; and we made a date for coffee upstairs after lunch. Terry apparently

mistaken sense of his own responsibility commenced to throw bombs. He fussed and fumed and murmured and objected, saying all he dared before strangers, trying to arouse Henri and me to a fitting sense of our value; and having no luck there endeavoured to fit himself into various odd corners of our arrangements, cavilling at this and that till he got to be a regular nuisance.

Isn't a man with a purpose in life the limit! Specially when that purpose settles on an object, and you're IT; and there are two free souls standing by, laughing up their sleeves, and wondering where the professor got aboard?

At last quite dazed, and seeing himself completely lost amid the threatened hurly-burly of trains, automobiles, boats and guns, let alone the Canadian wilderness, Griggs consented to follow my original plan, and return to New York with the goods on him.

Argument had wasted valuable time; Terry hustled us out. "You'll have to look alive and keep moving, Clarissa, if we're to catch the western express. Good-by, Mr. Griggs. Good luck."

Hastily I handed over the package, and Howard, reading my disappointment, swore not to open it till I was present. "You shall be in at the death, old thing. Cross my heart."

CHAPTER XV

We nearly missed the train as it was, on account of me having to buy a red rose. Directions were to sport a red rose as identification, and of course there wasn't a red rose to be got in the hotel — all sold, they declared. And I hadn't the ghost of an idea where a florist shop could be found in Toronto. Seeing our game go up the flue, if first aid didn't come at once, I called for help. It was a trying moment till Bully remembered spotting a red rose among the table decorations. He burst into the dining room, stole the trophy and bore it off right under the nose of a pompous headwaiter. Then we ran for it. Of course I had to have a separate taxi. My tickets had been all ready with the directions, a chair was reserved, and when I had captured my breath, I looked around to size up the passengers.

Holy smoke! Laugh? Folks must have thought the magazine I held the funniest out. Every seat in that car was full and nearly every traveller wore a red rose — both men and women. The girls being all young and well dressed like me, my personality submerged itself in the crowd. I was lost.

The conductor told me it was a wedding party going up for some swell girl's send off the next day, and as the bride was daughter to a turf king, they were all wearing his color for luck. Red! I saw red. Here was a pretty how d'ye do.

The long afternoon wore away in utter boredom. One of the wedding guests tried to get up a conversation with me on the strength of the badge, but I snubbed him short — I must keep free, and have my eyes on all sides to pull out of this blooming mix-up. The boys, of course, were in a separate car blissfully ignorant.

About a half hour before we were due, the train stopped at a junction, and a very few minutes later a short, bandy-legged fellow came through the car.

"Well, I be blowed!" he said, soto voce, looking from one passenger to another — then something seemed to come over him — I saw him turn green around the gills and spotted him for my man.

He went away and stayed long enough to go all through the train, but it looked as if our car had cornered the rose market, for he presently reappeared.

Sitting near the door as I was I could take good stock of him. His quivering nostrils alone betokened the state of his nerves. His shrewd gray eyes shifted constantly hither and thither. Time grew short. I was sure — sure enough to take the risk. Suddenly I tore my wilted flower off and threw it aside. The quick action caught his glance and focussed his attention on me.

"Wouldn't it crimp a snake!" I exclaimed. I wanted that last word to get to him.

He walked on as though he were going to pass, but I could see he was watching. Then I made a bold move. At my hand was the window glass all steamed over from the chill evening air. In a second, with a few strong lines I had drawn a rough picture of Henri's

winged sign. Had he been a detective instead of a confederate — good night, Clarissa!

The man stopped as if I had spoken, and smearing my sketch from the glass with a rather dirty hand, he peered through the rubbed spot.

"We are almost there, Madame," he said.

It was true. We were already steaming into a brightly lighted station — there was no time to talk.

"If you are on business, I'd advise you to dine at the Equadore — it's a good hotel," he said, and without more ado walked away.

I didn't like him from the start. He was so cold blooded. An ugly little shrimp, not too respectful — and after dinner I was due to start on a wild adventure with him. I shivered, and you may be sure I took long enough getting into a taxi and away, to make certain of the boys being able to follow me.

I carried a small dressing case which might easily have contained Stutz's package, but which held instead the nasty black six-shooter that Terry had insisted on my taking along. I noticed my man eyeing the bag and his look tipped me off not to check it at the dining room door. Evidently I was supposed to have that valuable sample along, and to cling to it. Well, I had no kick coming — a Colt is a good, steady friend.

The Equadore was a medium-busy commercial hotel where the stranger could and did join me at dinner without attracting any undue attention. I explained the matter of the wedding party to him, and he made no comment. He seemed a stolid soul.

"What happened to the old lady?" he asked presently, and gave it as his opinion it was poor policy to

change messengers every time. Pretending to be as taciturn as himself, I told the few words of explanation I knew and he seemed satisfied.

When he had finished eating, he brushed the crumbs from his clothes, reached for a toothpick, and said the car would be waiting in front at nine o'clock.

I strolled into the lounge where the boys sat chatting and smoking as though nothing were further from their minds than adventure. Sitting opposite trying to read, I got to thinking instead; comparing the Terrier with his splendid physique, free life, merry wit and kind heart with the sort of men I had been meeting in New York. Even Beaty Swanhill, his soul set on money getting, didn't bulk any too big, and a fellow like Jim Gower showed up for the rotter he was. Money isn't everything, Henri, I admonished; friendship's a whole lot — look at Terry and Bill. Of course Griggs had been pretty true to me. But I couldn't think of Howard and Terrance together. They were both gentlemen. Well, I wanted the accent on the last syllable — Howard's goose was cooked.

These thoughts didn't intrigue me so deep as to forget time; prompt on the stroke of the hour my black bag and I were in the vestibule to find my escort and his motor just as prompt. Thus I came to be tearing over a bad road in the middle of the night, with a thin, small, alert man whom I had known less than a few hours; rushing from a half baked city in Ontario to the north shore of Lake Erie, where, according to the latest bulletin, a boat would be waiting.

Every time the car did a bunk into a road valley, or rattled out on to the crest of a rut, imagination made

a wallop around the entire loop of Jacobs's activities. I had quite fully made up my mind what his line was. I was still keen on a cache, though there had been no word of it. Griggs had spoken lightly of opium in ship loads — maybe that boat would be ballasted.

We swayed from side to side perilously. We skidded in the sand. Sticks broke beneath our wheels and stones flew out. But nothing happened to slow our pace and nothing more piquant than these little events interrupted the gallop of my thoughts — for the driver paid me no attention. He was bent on getting over the ground as fast as chain lightning, and that though quite unconscious of the Terrier and Bully hitting it up behind, doing their own happy turns on this poetry of a turnpike; but keeping at a discreet distance until I found a chance to spike the enemy's guns.

After a million miles or so of flirting with sudden death we turned sharp to the right, and struck a single mud track leading through the scrub. Just whereabouts on the shore that boat lay three of the combined party had no idea. But I calculated, from the looks of things, there wouldn't be much complication in the automobile route. This road promised to lead to the back of beyond without intersection; and at worst my chauffeur could be pressed into usefulness by the judicious manipulation of a shooting iron.

On and on and on we sped. Thickets of stunted trees thinned and fell away altogether. We shot over stony patches between bare uplands. We rolled on by miles of rock and blueberry bushes, and finally into heavier soil and taller growth.

All guidance as to the country or locality had to be guessed from the flying edges of the narrow path, one

instant illuminated by our lamps, the next whirled into oblivion. And on this too hung the decision of time and place.

Down the wind came a strong smell of water, warning me to be quick. I fumbled for my hand bag, opened it, and leaning far out on the side of the car thrust my automatic toward the wheel and pulled. With a vicious noise that might well have been the bursting of an overheated tire, and a terrible lurch, almost pitching us to kingdom come, we settled on to the rim. My driver slowed down at once, cussing.

I threw the smoking revolver far into the night, and turned panicky, calling in alarm: "What is it — help!"

"Shut yer noise! Puncture," he replied; and going around to look at his wheel, "Now what in the devil did that?"

"Can't you go on? These are some roads you have in Canada!" I climbed out and joined him, for it was up to me to lengthen our delay.

The man seemed to resent that national dig, and eyed me in a surly sort of way. And wishing to reestablish confidence I offered to walk. "It's not far now, is it?"

"Mind your own business. I'll get you there." The brutal snub set me thinking. This was no country bumpkin awed by an accomplice from the great white city. I surely felt we had one of the heads of the gang to deal with, and began to tremble in my shoes.

A second later he straightened, stood tense, listening, and then spoke in abrupt command:

"Somebody's coming. We stay here. Get back to the car."

The drumming of the boys' automobile could now be distinctly heard. My man would not give them a lead to the shore behind his lights, nor did he wish to open any controversy unless forced. Time was evidently precious. He squatted to his tire; but I could see him watching from ambush, catlike, ready to spring.

The Terrier and Bully whizzed past crashing through underbrush. For a moment we were stark in their lights; then they slowed just beyond the reach of ours, and walked back boldly in the center of the road as if to offer help. God knows it was a lonely enough place to smash, and to have left any one there in the lurch wouldn't have been decent. They shouted, and not getting any answer dipped into the darkness. Mr. Driver had spotted a trap before it was fairly sprung. His hand flew to his hip. But the boys were too swift. They shot like bolts out of the inky blackness behind his lamps, and kneeling as he was to jack the wheel the smuggler hadn't a chance. A regular mix up followed. They fought in the ditch, smothered by strong dead grass and decayed leaves. Fearfully I heard the grunts and groans and the snapping of dried wood. Then Bully's voice called for a light.

Terry covered their prisoner, while Bully searched him. In the glow of an electric candle I could see his glance hunting me, alarmed for what I was supposed to be carrying, and now mistrustful. With hands raised, his breath coming hard and cold murder in his eyes, he was planning. But he looked such a bandy-

legged, hopeless shrimp beside the two giants that mutiny became a bare-faced impertinence. We should worry!

"I'm not going to damage you," the Terrier said quietly. "We have a keen desire to take a ride with this lady — and you'll show the way. Do you get me?"

He shrugged. "It's all the same to me. I'm paid to drive the young woman out here." And with a short ugly laugh, "Wouldn't like anything to happen to her."

"Nothing's going to happen to her." I marvelled at their control.

My friends were a bit careless with him on purpose, as we walked to their car, and he managed to whisper:

"Chuck it over. I'll make a break for it — you lose, girl. Why in hell weren't you armed?"

Bully wheeled like a flash and covered me too — a magnificent piece of acting. Whether it would be useful or not, the man must now believe me one of his own gang. I wrapped a smile about us in the darkness.

The road curved again sharply and ran from there a half mile straight to the shore, where it grew sick of its own rottenness and expired suddenly on the edge of a picnic clearing. Logs lay about, and boards had been nailed from stump to stump where the position of the trees invited benches. On one hand stood a deserted shanty with an open booth for selling drinks. And on the other a great cairn of stones surmounted by a miniature lighthouse, used no doubt during the summer season. Smooth ground, grass grown, cut an abrupt line against the water; and below this a clay

bank dropped some twenty feet or more to a stony beach. We could hear the lap of Erie on her pebbles as she lay licking her lips, mindful even in a smooth hour of her evil propensity to storm.

Our lamps revealed the inky surface of the lake, and a flight of steps leading from the tufted slope to the little jetty at its feet. Away at the end lay the promised boat, a dim form half hidden in darkness. No sooner had our engines stopped than silence closed over and around us. It muffled nature in a blanket. The place must have been miles from anywhere.

Bully jumped out directly and ran down on the pier. The boatmen, expecting us and busy getting her ready, were taken completely by surprise. His was an easy victory. We heard faintly the cry, "Hands up!" And soon two heads and another one bobbed above the bank, as our ally marshalled his brace on shore. He covered the driver and these wops, while Terry dug some rope out of our tonneau. The boys had made a show of searching me for arms, and I was allowed to sit there, neglected, an onlooker, rather enjoying the game.

The police business, thought I, is mighty easy. Firemen can put it over any risky duty squad for courage and heroism. Of course we might have made a spill up yonder if the thug had pulled a second too soon. But he didn't pull. He didn't get a chance. Pistols aren't nearly so deadly at close range as a knife; and it would take a man with a cast-iron skull not to fall for Bully's fist when smartly applied. Look at the boobs — three to our two — and weren't we putting it over them from every angle of the compass! Once tied and loaded on to their own craft what a

fools' cargo they'd be! Luck ahoy! Happy day Jacobs! Wait till we get loose with your ballast!

Cripes! Right in the middle of my self-congratulation a sinister throbbing merged with the silence. It tickled my nerves. I opened my lips to speak, and saw the Terrier drop his rope end. He put a hand to his ear. The throbbing grew louder. It purred. All of us could hear the sound distinctly. It hummed. Six desperate adventurers stood spellbound, while from back along the road, came that steady high power droning of another automobile. For a moment instead of enemies we felt together one common instinct of self-preservation. But circumstances cleft a nice division between hope and fear — the smugglers calculated they couldn't be much worse off. It was our turn to tremble.

A pistol cracked prematurely. That familiar sound galvanized the Terrier.

"Beat it back to the other car, girl! There's going to be trouble."

Never had his voice rung clearer or more masterful. Yet as I stepped out on the far side from our prisoners, his fingers closed over my wrist like a vice, and he hissed:

"Drop! Get under cover in the bushes!"

On our hands and knees, sheltered from sight by the bulk of the car, we crawled away into the darkness.

Bully backed toward the wharf still holding the gang under menace of seven deadly shots. The Terrier called to him tersely, loudly, in a foreign tongue. Bully replied. They spoke Cree, and it was pretty sure to get by even among a mixed crowd. These

two hadn't been knocking around ten years with the redman for nothing. Having settled their plans, Bully suddenly disappeared into the night. I think he continued to hold his party under cover — but who could be sure? — they least of all. Anyway they didn't take liberties with the possibility.

The smugglers stood for suspense till a pair of headlights glared at them down the straight road, and then they got cold feet and broke for the boat.

Hardly a minute later a flivver bounced into the clearing and a throaty voice — a voice that made me jump — called them by name. Three forms slowly emerged from nowhere and gathered in a family pow-wow.

"We were held up," the chauffeur explained. "The girl and me. She was plucky — but tricky. Maybe she made a getaway just now. Those tikes heard you coming an' funked it."

"Himmel! Nothing to be afraid of she had not," the German jeweler replied. "She iss an impostor — a zeif! I haf telegrams from New York zis day — but too late, too late!" Sobs choked him. I remembered the unctious laugh and smiled.

A long-drawn whistle expressed bandy-leg's surprise. "Thought the dub meant to let her run. So she was fooling me. Damn!" Then his opinion flopped over. "Why should she come here, if she had robbed us? That wouldn't be likely, Stutz, you know damned well!"

"She iss a government spy. Zey fear nottings. Poys, zey are out after us. Let me get in der poat quickly und run away. My business ruined — my goot business — my peautiful little store!" He wept.

"Zey will be going now to spread ze alarm — let me get away."

"Quit? Not on your tintype! First we shut their gab — see? And then we go after the stuff. Hustle, boys."

"Boss told her to breeze for the car," mumbled one of his boatmen.

"Cut them off. They'd be sneaking back in the dark while Stutz came down. It takes time to fix a tire, though, and, if they run on the rim, we can easily shove our nose along. Hell! It's a cinch! We're five to nothing."

Terry had expected them to do just this; act on his command to me and go back after us — on a wild-goose chase. Lying low in the scrub, not a stone's throw from the speaker, he pinched me as his stratagem carried through.

Excited? Possibly we were just a suspicion above our usual spirits; but so far I hadn't felt much afraid. Terry was equal to any of the gang, I knew, and our third hand also was a confidence supporter with a fighting record. The idea of Stutz in any shooting row made it a gallery play. However, the old Herr didn't see that side of the farce himself, and proved very reluctant to go back seeking trouble. The captain, my driver, insisted. It was better, he said, to take a pot shot at us from behind, than make good their escape by water and land plump into the government's arms; for, of course, if we escaped and gave official notice of their having a boat, every port would be watched.

With that he took the wheel and old Stutz clambered in, whimpering about his "peautiful pizness."

We waited for them to get quite away. Not till all was safely quiet did Terry draw me out of the bushes and explain the plan he had made with Bill in their Indian jabber.

"Looks as if the cairn were the best cover here. Bully is going to swipe their boat. Ah, he has her now — I hear the engine. He will come in for us farther up shore when things have quieted down, for we're going to have fun here yet. They are due to find the automobile ditched and turn right back. We will go hide behind the cairn. Its shadow will protect us from their lights, and we can slip away from that position, easy!"

Walking over rough ground in pitch-black night, with insecurity befront and melodrama behind, and a crisp wind newly sprung across leagues of fresh water driving through your town clothes like tissue paper and into your marrow bones, must be charged on the debit side of Romance. Under the above mentioned disadvantages it took some fifteen minutes, seemingly as many years, to reach the hospitable defence of piled rocks, standing on the highest and least sheltered ridge of land. Moreover, our wits having been in close communion with our feet during the pilgrimage, we missed something. Either preoccupation, or the change in the wind, numbed our ears. Suddenly, without warning to us, the road behind broke into a roar of execrations. Shots rang out. Oaths volleyed. Cries, confusion, and the whirring, whirring, whirring of machinery beat our brains.

"What in thunder! Is it the boat? Have they missed the boat? Look sharp!"

We dodged behind the cairn. A velvet void sur-

ver was dancing a war dance toward the lake, cutting capers over stones in a blistering heel and toe madness, while behind, a brute of a touring car swept along at breakneck speed, gaining on them with every revolution. Our enemies hugged the cushions, not daring to rise and fire, for they ran now in the full glare of the other's electric lamps.

The rackety-packety chase bent away to the right, then swerved and drove hard on the shore line, bandy-legs steering for a point beyond the circle of illumination, where the murk lay thickest and the going must be a sad, bad hazard. We thought they were beating it to get out of sight; to duck behind their own bulwark and open the music — their one frantic chance. We waited for them to slow, to chivy round, to dip for shadow. But nothing doing. The little devil-driver, with his jaw set and his arms braced, held her head straight on destruction. She rose and fell like a galloping horse. She skimmed from ridge to ridge.

"Great God!" cried Terry, as the crazy man's object burst upon us. "He's going over! — They'll both go over! He's trapped them!"

Suddenly he thrust his weight against our light and she tilted back a fraction, sending a cold ray after the scudding Ford. It was already on the brink. It rocked and cavorted friskily, as though an imp had seized it; and in the same instant that it hung over the black vacuum, we saw three forms rise and jump. Stutz and the captain went down with their car. She leaped into open air and somersaulted, her lamps for one moment revealing the horror, then soused into eternal night.

Two men made good their escape. One lay prone. In less than a jiffy the only life left on that silent stage was the mile-eating plunger booming along — racing and tearing — swiftly propelled to damnation. Too late to stop? Death rose and mocked them. Doom opened her arms. It was all the same whether they steered ahead or turned, for no weight of chassis could hold her down on a swing at such an angle, and in such a speed, over the rolling turf.

We held our breath. The thing looked alive — looked so brave and beautiful dashing ahead gallantly joshing Fate. She achieved personality. Her load became merely springs and wires animating disaster. We trembled and feared and admired. But at the last minute her driver lost his nerve. He twisted her. Instead of making a magnificent end the poor car reared, toppled, turned turtle and dropped ignominiously, with a terrific splintering crash, to the beach below.

Cries of pain and cries of fear, yells, threats, oaths convulsed the darkness there. I shivered and stopped my ears. But the Terrier remained gazing out, his bright eyes and white face shining.

"Courage! Did you ever see anything like it?" he cried. "And vengeance! I take my hat off! Unless that fellow was stuck in high he's a rare sport — but a damned good kind to fight shy of all the same. I'm glad his whim didn't seize him earlier. He must have been in bad to do it. This is no place for you, Clarissa. Let's quit. This is no playground. It's a bloody battle. That last car held the police."

Erie's high banks shut us off from sight of the

wreck, and that was just as well. Hearing was one too many. But I felt we ought to do something by way of rescue.

"And get a shot in the back for our pains. No, sir! The last car is a wreck — but the first one went into the water — they may come off alive — we know at least one of the gang is free hereabouts to help them. We'll leave him the light. It's cut and run, now, while we can — and mighty lucky to get the chance."

Quickly an awed girl and a silent man climbed down the narrow stair. Once started we had no difficulty in reaching the water edge, for we just stood together and slid down in a landslip of soft clay. The shore lay flat. We footed it for twenty minutes on pebbles and hard sand, and then ventured a soft coo-e-e. No answer. The coast changed gradually to flat stones and large boulders. After an hour's weary scramble we came suddenly upon Bully holding the smugglers' boat off the rocks. She was riding in deep water, but the Terrier's flash showed her much damaged as to complexion.

"What delayed you? I had a devil of a time making landing single-handed — never would have been able to get in here except for the calm."

"Tell you later. Shove her off. Lots of people around. Nasty mess."

Her engine chugged. We backed between sharks' teeth, curved sharply, ducked from side to side. We missed twenty separate and distinct sizes of sudden death above water and heaven knows what below. Bully yelled directions to beat the band, then glided into splendid peace.

"Boost her!" ordered Terry.

He moved a handle and we shot straight out. No lights guarded her. Our wake lay pale to a clouded moon. Only the stars, once in a while, and the splashing of mounting waves bore us company.

After a while the Terrier and I sitting forward began to talk of former days, Cobalt, and our friends, who had made good and who had gone under. Ross, driving away, had struck it again on the Victoria and was cleaning up a pile. Doc? — Just the same. Jake? — just the same; sitting most all day on the porch with his wicked spurs dangling. I felt a kind of sinking that I thought was homesickness for the wilds and put it into words.

"Hunger," pronounced Terry. "Me too! When you were in Cobalt you wearied for fashion. And certainly a life of fashion hasn't been dull if to-night's jamboree is a sample. Why, you've had more excitement to-night, Clarissa, than most women know in a lifetime."

"Excitement's very emptying. Where do they put on the dining car? What's our next move?"

"Starvation," he laughed. "We've got to lie off till morning, run in where it looks good and foot it to a village. There's nothing suspicious about this party, but dirty shoes. Besides, it will take time for the news to spread. The police are down and out. Thieves don't tell tales, and we'll keep mum. By way of precaution Bully might go east while we visit Detroit. Suppose the authorities did search you, there's not a thing — not even a revolver. Say! What did you do with it?"

"I threw it away."

"With five perfectly good shots! Whew! Your

place is on Fifth Avenue, all right — or in the movies. That whole road drama might have been omitted, girl — several hundred feet of film. Why bust a tire and risk your neck in the toss, when you're riding behind a flesh and blood driver and holding a loaded six?"

"Hold him up! I'd never have dared."

"Clarissa, you're a wise one. It doesn't do for a woman to be too cold blooded." He beamed at me.

"Well, there is nothing in the boat; as far as locating your imaginary cache goes we'd have come as near it in our beds. We have nothing on us and — the police can't get anything on us. It was a fine idea sending that box down with the English dude. I'd make away with the stuff — burn it or something — and then keep out. The criminal action looms large — it's safer to be out than in."

"Oh, I intend to," I gasped. "I'm sure Griggs will holler 'enough' when he hears about this. He's fussy, but really a good sort, and has stood by me through several funny stunts."

With my head on my arm leaning against Terry's knee, for I was tired after our rampage, I told him the story of the sniff-bottle, and how I had taken a French borrow to raise my fare north.

"Decent of Griggs to keep quiet knowing me so little, wasn't it? Not many would have been game."

"Not many." The Terrier gazed down at me, his eyes glowing, shiny and warming. "You're full of pluck — chuck full, aren't you, little pal?"

Something in his tone, his glance, pierced my soul. All at once I knew him the only person in the whole world who would ever appeal sufficiently to both Henri

and me. Little ways, almost feminine intuition, dallying with poetry and such trifles, on one side, and his recklessness, his dash and sanity and strength, on the other, bound together by a bon camaraderie which never failed even in the worst of weather, had thrown a lasso round our man and woman instincts. The look on his face now pulled it tight and dragged the maverick to earth. I wanted to hug him. I longed to be hugged — me, Clarissa Kendall, lady of the icy mitt! I was so happy I felt like crying and so miserable I wanted to laugh; for of course this hour couldn't last eternally. I knew the Terrier must be the most wonderful companion in the Universe — stronger, braver, finer, truer than all others. He was real. Master in the fight back there, and now — so understanding. I longed for him to brand me with all the legal formalities going, and take over Henri's fortune.

Goodness knows what might have happened, if humor hadn't leaped to the rescue. Instantly, clearly as a living picture, I saw my beloved running away into the woods on the Lelland rush. He was doubled over, a canoe rested on his shoulders, and he crabbed it through the bushes at an eager pace. It seemed to me he wasn't only hustling to beat Ross and the rest, but was scared stiff, and happy to be lighting out from the toils of the original New York scalp-hunter who had hung upon his track in Cobalt so persistently.

I'll bet love was the only thing the Terrier ever did run away from! But remembering how he had shunned me then put the kibosh on sentiment all the same, and I murmured, just to carry us over that pregnant silence:

"It was decent of Griggs."

"Yes. The man's all right."

After a pause, from what looked like a miscarriage of mental telepathy, Terry added:

"But don't marry him, Clarissa. He isn't your sort."

"How do you know he's asked me?"

"Oh, he has. Sure thing! They all have — I don't blame them." And with a quizzical smile, "I guess I'm the only one you've ever known so far who hasn't."

"And never will, eh — what?" I mimicked laughing, though the cockles of my heart went cold.

A queer spasm of expression crossed his face. "Might. Can't tell. A man never knows his luck."

Good old scout. His luck was so persistently bad!

"Even this didn't come off as we planned it," he said, finishing my thought for me. And then he turned very serious.

"Keep out of these things, girl, promise me. You've got brains, don't let them run away with you. Fight the day-wasters and the Broadway-bats off your hoard. And go slow on the wedding bells. When a woman marries, she ought to look up, not down, and there aren't very many men can keep you looking up for long."

CHAPTER XVI

I wired Griggsy the hour of my return, and he was on the platform to meet me, tearing his hair.

"What's new?" I hailed cheerily, for I saw the boy looked worried.

He opened on me like a machine gun. Crack! R-r-r-r-r-r-! First blood to Murphy, and then the rapid fire.

"Jove! Clarissa! I thought you would never come! I've pictured you dead, dying, mangled, wounded, cast away somewhere in the wild woods — maybe arrested! I didn't hear a single word and I went pretty nearly crazy. Wherever have you been hiding?"

"I've been asleep like Periwinkle," I laughed. "Trying to square myself for a night's adventure. Say! It seems a thousand years!"

"Jolly awkward for me left here — having the box, don't you know, and not a ghost of an idea what to do with the bally thing — where to put it — how to preserve it."

"Put it in your bureau drawer, bonehead! It ain't worth much." Fuss about nothing always did peeve me, and, moreover, I had just alighted from a long journey.

"Bureau drawer!" he gasped. "Are you crazy? I've stayed in bed every minute of the time and nursed it under my pillow. I haven't had proper food or sleep — I could hardly take a bath. Jackson's an

excellent valet — but —. Here's your bally box. Keep it."

He whipped the black case out of his inner pocket and thrust it on me, and I was obliged to crowd it aboard in spite of my umbrella and bag and gloves. I can't think of anything more irritating.

We were standing on the ferry by then and a sudden inspiration to get even with him made me raise my hand.

"If the stuff is such a bugbear, perhaps we'd just better throw it overboard and be shut of it. All ready? Shoot."

"Clarissa!" snatching my arm.

I don't know whether or not I really intended to chuck the case away. I was sore at not having found any cache, and determined to go out of detective work. This was quick and simple. Besides Griggs was raising such an unheard-of fuss. It didn't matter, however, for his arm action controlled mine. The thing went flying out of my hand, struck the rail, and ricochetted on to a heap of coal that was being run through to the hold. Howard in his light tweeds made a leap for it. His foot struck the open cover and he sprawled. Everybody roared, and no one seemed to realize his object. The grimy giant shovelling wiped the grin from his Irish mug and stuck his spade deeper. A soft shower followed instantly. But Griggs was on his feet again, and down the chute like a flash. Mirth turned to consternation at his disappearance. The deck hands got wise to something valuable having been lost and did their level best to stem the steady flow of coal from the carts, but it was impossible to back water quick enough. My escort came up against

a scattered bombardment. He stood erect, dancing a Highland fling to keep his footing, and gradually sinking as the yielding mass below gave under his weight. In a half minute he had sunk from his waistband to near his chest. Fellow passengers tugged on his arms, too weak with laughter to raise him. And I sat limp.

At last the darkey driver climbed out of his cart and rammed one of his tail-boards down the hole on an incline. Up this, with much assistance, poor Griggs scrambled. He was quite white about the face, barring streaks, and very black about his pants. But he held the cherished package, and continued to hold it, not deeming me in my sane senses.

"Why didn't you smoke the stuff while you were in bed, and have a good time?" I asked spitefully.

A dawning amazement kindled his eyes. "Haven't you seen the papers?"

"Not a one. I've been in bed too, but I had reason."

I was ready to launch at once into the terrific story of real night life, but the boy cut me off short.

"Wait!"

He hurried away and after a wild tour of unoccupied seats ran a daily to earth. This he handed me folded in half. It was a Hearst paper and bore the day's sensation in enormous letters right across the top:

UNITED STATES ROBBED OF MILLIONS

GANG OF SMUGGLERS TAKEN RED HANDED — FIGHT POLICE

Detectives Working Diamond Clues Make a Smashing Finish.

("They did," I murmured.)

Big fight on Canadian Border. Three killed. Government Officer Wounded. Two Arrests.
Boatman Turns King's Evidence.

GIRL ROBBER ROBS THE ROBBERS
WHERE ARE THE DIAMONDS?

I knew the answer to that question. In Howard Griggs's inner pocket. And five minutes before they had been down an Erie Ferry coal-hole!

"You'll lunch with me at the Ritz? Is your car waiting?" I felt weak about the knees.

Looking back it seems this tale is one continual performance of meals, Griggs and I vis-à-vis. But what can you do with a story of New York life and have it life-like. We ordered three courses served upstairs, and ensconced ourselves with the latest copy of every local newspaper piled around. There I told of our wild night. How the boys had chased Bandy-legs and sprung their trap. And the smugglers getting wise had come flying after me. And how the Government had swooped down on the lot and been decoyed into a cold bath. Take it from me, on top of my version, the *Evening Journals'* read tame. They gave us a quantity of information on minor points — things it is well to know. For instance: that diamonds are always packed in paper, folded like a powder. I sat up.

"Ah, Jacobs! You're it! Diamonds! Say. Griggsy, I took him for a doctor collecting drugs — ain't I the simp?"

Strange to say the papers made no mention of Jacobs, gave not a hint of the pawnshop, or the cottage

on the beach, or of any of the items we knew so well, and which were really vital. Our bunch was working on the inside track — and the police racing us neck and neck outside. The two pursuits had come dangerously near collision.

Griggs, firm in his convictions, maintained if I could only receive Henri's messages clearer, we would know all there was to know.

"Maybe they got rid of him because he knew too much," I suggested.

"Jolly likely! And we're in a jolly awkward mess now because of him, and he's got to get busy and get us out. Nice case, don't you know, if anybody found the stones, refused to believe us innocent, and all that. Has de Grasse any remarks to make, Clarissa?"

His tone sounded haggard. I knew it was fear for Angelica and the name of Griggs, so I gave five minutes to silent thought, my spiritualistic companion keeping respectfully in the background.

By and by the winged snake began to dodge around, always with his little rubber dodging alongside, and suddenly I snapped the shutter on an idea, and proceeded to develop it for Howard.

"Listen, Griggsy! These sparklers don't belong to us. We know where they do belong, and the safe deal is to return them. What I undertook as a lark, or at best to hound Henri's murderer, has landed us in the criminal class. 'Girl Robber Robs the Robbers!' That makes me feel good! If I hand them over to the police, do I get away with it? Nix! Too many questions. Can I put this case in a deposit vault? Every bank throughout the country will be watching for it. And I'm not going to offer it board and lodging here.

Don't let's fool ourselves. Jacobs isn't one to lie down under his loss. He'll sic a search party on, hot foot, and invest enough small change to afford milady a single-trip ticket to Sing Sing. He's all fitted out with the American court regalia, money and politics, and not a principle as big as a peanut to stumble over. He needs to cover his own track, also. There's incentive for you! Of course I can squeal on him, make a horrid noise, but he don't guess it. Besides the public still calculates smoke rises from fire, and it's hard to reason with an old-fashioned mule. I'd look fine trying to explain Henri to a grand jury of New York voters! Exposure means dirty work all around — time, trouble, annoyance. There's only one thing to be done then. Dump the rhinestones on the gang. We can breeze out to the beach, unburden, and skip. No call to leave cards. Probably the place will be deserted. Business as usual under these conditions? I don't think."

"This is de Grasse speaking — marvellous!" said Griggs, with a rapturous roll of his eyes.

"My plan is to wire for the *Swallow*. Board her at Freeport. Run east. Dock five or ten minutes at the bar, and come away with clean hands. Who'll be the wiser?"

"It's late in the year for boating," ventured Howard. "Jolly conspicuous, don't you know."

"You bet it's conspicuous, and we'll make it more so. I can race around those waters every day for a week — two weeks — five — till Christmas. Have a bee in my bonnet. Get my name in print — 'Clarissa Kendall of the Kendall Mines dippy on the dashing wave.' I ought to be a reporter! And talking of

print. We'll tell Tom Landy, afterwards, and warn him to clam up. I was going to give him the dope anyway for a scoop — perhaps it's too risky now."

Griggs, hynotized by the thought of de Grasse as a supernatural agent, hailed the scheme as a wonder, and agreed to come along.

CHAPTER XVII

On Tom's advice we selected a quiet day for our jaunt, at least it was quiet in Manhattan, but by the time we arrived on the south shore of Long Island, the wind was beginning to whoop it up; and that's just a sample of how every detail went wrong from the start.

First calamity, Griggs jammed his foot while transferring from the small boat into the *Swallow*. He let out an unearthly, unEnglish squawk, and we tried to persuade him to go ashore there and then. But I fancy he was a bit riled over having cried, and he stuck to it that the wound was a mere scratch. Of course we had to ship him, against better judgment. Any one with half an eye could see he suffered. And he would be a dead weight in case of emergency. Twenty minutes later he slipped his boot off and confessed himself on the shelf. His toes were swelling to beat the band.

Fussing about Howard one way and another the tide dropped on us. Before you could say Jack Robinson we'd missed the confounded channel, and the *Swallow* was all tied up in grass. It was my fault. I was at the wheel. But that didn't make me any the nicer tempered. Neither Tom nor I knew this shore for we had always played her off the Jersey coast.

We reversed and drove out, and combed the weeds from her gear as much as possible. Then Tom said

it would be madness to try to run through a tricky, winding, roundabout canal in two inches of water. We must either go by the open ocean, or hunt a pilot, or wait for high tide. Which left us but one choice, for the last alternatives meant putting off the trip till another day. After doing my bit as guardian of the loot, I was strong on immediate action. So we turned, glided through the harbor, and launched our expedition on a heaving sea.

The *Swallow's* nimble but she doesn't bulk large, and being about as slim as they're built waves can't do a thing to her! The wind was rising fast. It would strike us harmlessly from behind, going east. But we had to navigate the bay on an angle and poor Griggs added that leave-me-to-die feeling on top of his other anguish. His measure of woe was pressed down and literally running over.

I noticed Tom looking seaward every little while, anxiously trying to calculate the wickedness of a black cloud mass piling from the horizon. Calculating on sea moods isn't ever too easy. And conversation don't help. I left him to figure to himself.

"How are we going to recognize the place when we do arrive?" Howard asked, between spasms. "I never saw so many houses all so jolly alike."

"You voice my sentiments," I yelled, and would have said more, but it made one's head sing to talk against that gale. The whole shore lay before us, linked house to house, showing less variety than a machine-made chain. It struck me cold till I remembered Uncle Sam's soldier standing to the south, which had loomed out as we neared the bar from the other side. I consulted Tom, with difficulty, for busting

my lungs only made me sound like a sick graphophone, and he allowed it must have been the Fire Island Light. Soon I spied a gray finger pointing out of nothing, and kept the *Swallow's* head hard on. She did the bird-act all right, when we gave her water.

Lickety-split down the coast at the height of my hobby's power! The air cut with a knife edge. Poor Griggs! What would it be going back? Tom hung over her rhythmic throb attentive as a lover to his lady's lips. For me there was the intoxication of speed. To-day, amid pounding seas, and a gale shoving behind, holding her wheel grew into a savage joy. Something of the lawlessness of our errand got into our blood. We shouted snatches of old salt songs, each taking his pick in a tune. We rioted like a pair of kids pretending to be bloody pirates. I was having a whale of a time. I wouldn't have asked for a better half hour, if only we had been out for the fun of the ride, and Griggs not so uncomfortable.

Good things generally call a quick halt. Our knock came as we sighted a gray house on the dunes, and I passed the word to stop. Tom put her engine at half. I turned her nose toward land, and it took one broadside to tell us trouble. The crash of water hit her in the midriff. She staggered. Her light sides shuddered. Her joists groaned. The little bird straining bravely slid from beneath that terrific weight; but another would put her out of business. I tugged at the stearing gear uselessly, for the tide had us and its ebb was strong. A second mountain rose, towered — and Tom's iron hand fell on mine. He seemed to be dragging the whole bottom out of the ocean, but he turned her wheel over. The lump of a wave vanished,

flowing under our keel, lifting instead of swamping us. I pushed the high speed and we leaped ahead. The beach with its landmarks whirled away on our left.

Tom sprang back to his engine and stood calling directions. His voice sailed to me like a trumpet note.

"See that line of foam on the starboard? She's chewing the rag there. It means sand. At low water that bar will break the surf. Keep inside and you'll find shelter."

"We've passed the place. There!" I cried, pointing backward. A gray cottage flashed into sunshine and fell cold and cheerless again as the rift in the clouds above it closed. No smoke curled from the chimney.

We spun on. I knew how fast my *Swallow* travelled, and began to worry. The fortune, securely carried in a camera case slung beneath my coat, nagged me every time I moved. I was anxious to be quit of it — but how to land? Where to land, in that welter of pounding surf?

"Port your helm!" roared Tom.

I jumped. Most unexpectedly the bars we were skimming between curved. The south shore widened, sparsely covered with grass; and the sea narrowed to a deep channel sweeping inland. The long point of Fire Island protected us on one side, while our goal lay open on the other. We followed around, and two miles perhaps beyond our object, slowed up in comparative safety. Tom dropped anchor near shore and prepared to carry me off.

Then arose problem three-hundred-and-sixty-nine. Griggs had joined the party for the express purpose of

accompanying me to the dunes. We had touched on scientific value once or twice while discussing plans; but he didn't have to argue half so hard this time. Knowing all I knew about the interior of Jacobs's menagerie I made no bones about accepting escort. I'd have taken an armed guard with delight. However jammed toes and nausea are poor preparation for a big adventure. We excused Howard from the lists. The question on the carpet was whether Tom would step along with me or remain by the boat.

We all wanted it to be both ways, and that set the programme for a peach of a wrangle. I desired Tom's company. Heaven witness! I yearned for his strong right arm. But I wouldn't consent to leave the boat to Howard, who doesn't know a thing about engines; nor Howard to the *Swallow,* considering the high wind, the choppy sea, and the devilishness of Fate. Griggs gnashed his teeth over risking the scientific possibilities hid in de Grasse and me on another wild-goose chase. But all the same, he'd as soon have crawled along on his wounded anatomy as have stayed in the boat alone. Tom said he hated to have me walk back that two miles against a tearing wind. He argued for comfort, not dreaming of any gamble on safety, and let it be clearly seen that he thought the *Swallow* and Howard mismated.

One can't explain the ins and outs of a delicate situation to a man wading above his knees, ready to carry one to shore, and the thermometer at fifty.

"Maybe you aren't saving me from cold feet, Tom," I said, as he took me in his arms.

"Oh, that's all right," he answered cheerily, accepting the obvious meaning of my words. "Your

friend's a dub in a boat, Miss Clarissa — a regular landlubber. They'd go to the bottom together, sure, if we left them at large."

As I watched him climb back into the *Swallow,* his wet legs gleaming against her black sides, it occurred to me I might have sent Tom with the package and have stayed aboard myself. But I was too proud to show the white feather at that late date. Instead, I had an inspiration and called to him through cupped hands:

"Try if you can make it through the channel and moor at the dock on the bay side. I landed there once. It's deep water. It will save me — the walk — back."

"Why can't we take you around, then?"

I shook my head. "You may not be able to run through. We can't afford to waste time. I'm off."

I reckoned the *Swallow* had done about four miles in her last ten minutes and walking back to that cottage, which must have been half way, was likely to be some little stunt. I was surprised to find the going easy — I had started on a sheltered end of the beach, and didn't allow for it. I skimmed along, feeling keyed up, full of energy, fresh charged by a dash through wind and spray, that must have awakened the spirits of a mouse. I ran. I walked. I played at being a speed boat. I licked up the distance, till, suddenly rounding a point, the full force of a rip-splitting gale hurled me back. It wrapped my skirts about my knees and held me so, drenching me with salt water. Lot's wife had nothing on me as a helpless pillar of brine. And then the wind unlashed me and prepared to play other pranks. Just to brace against it took all my effort. I labored sidewise,

panting, and gained a partial shelter among the dunes.

Here it was possible to work forward in stages. I had peace at least dodging from hummock to hummock, though the wind roared between. The sea made a tremendous noise. I couldn't hear my own voice. Some places I was obliged to climb over the dunes, and the up and down ate into time. And worst of all, the sand began to blow off them in great stinging clouds. When one of these gusts swirled down on me, there was nothing to do but grit my teeth, shut my eyes, and hold my head low against it. Sunshine flashed over the scene, and gave way to shadow, glowed brightly, and faded. The two played tag up and down the beach.

"Jumpin' Jimminy!" I cried. "Why go to Egypt to enjoy sand?" And the storm caught my words and whisked them away so I might as well have been speaking to deaf ears. This gave me an uncanny feeling.

In spells it seemed as if I just stood there and pawed the atmosphere with my hands and feet, locomotion not getting an inch forwarder. But I must have been moving all the time, because, finally, I came over one of the dunes into full view of the house. The wind abated at that minute, and in the lull I slid down the sloping sandbank, and sat considering, trying to catch up with my breath, wondering what next? Sand was swirling around the cottage, and the sun shone out making all those crazy particles dance in its light. I saw the picture drifting in a golden mist and it looked mighty pretty.

While I was resting there, toying with admiration and thinking how unlike Felix the outside of his jolly

little shack appeared, the cellar door opened, and out popped my old sailor man. He carried a small bundle in a red handkerchief, I could see the color plainly, and he stood blinking, peering this way and that as if wondering where he must start to. Perhaps he saw me. He saw something that scared him. For all of a sudden he whisked about and made off in the opposite direction. Trying to move fast against the wind he looked like a funny, bent old crab.

"Canned it!" thought I. "He tholed mair from Felix than his aged nerves could stand. Maybe they're all gone and he's making good his escape."

The door was open anyway, and my course lay clear. I had only to go in and put the case on the buffet, or in a drawer. Diamonds don't depreciate by lying around, however, I intended, if the place showed signs of desertion, to fix them snug. You see Henri took a loving interest in that white treasure. This disposal was his idea from first to last, and owing to twinges in my upper region I began to fear it had been evolved as a sop to Griggs. Rather than suffer the actual loss of police interferences de Grasse preferred to hand the plunder to confederates, and trust his wits for getting a share back later.

Cautiously I slipped into the dark, boarded cellar. I listened. Silence. Not an indication of life. Sneaking into another person's house after I had seen the caretaker cut and run gave me a curious sensation. There was no need to feel fishy. I had come to restore, not to practise deceit, and yet I felt like a thief. My jumpiness was not fear of Felix — though I loathed meeting the woman. I knew at heart Henri and the diamonds were more than a match for him.

Tiptoeing past the upturned boat and the empty booze cases brought me to the heavily built ladder. Everything was damp, mildewed, swollen. Not a sound heralded my approach. The absolute quiet fell over one's spirits cheerful as a wet blanket. I should have been capering and singing pæans at missing a round with the family pets. Instead, I progressed like a funeral.

If the cellar felt eerie, the kitchen looked human enough, and just about their class of human. It was stacked with dirty dishes and refuse of food. Plates piled under the table and on the table gave the lie to my host's absence. Cups and bowls overflowed the sink. Stew pans found a last port on top of a dirty lighted stove — lighted, mark you! Somebody besides the old boy must have been living here.

I listened again. Only the roar of the surf and the wind racketed without.

I stole through the anteroom and peered from behind their cotton drape. Silence! The whole place seemed larger, but it was still dimly lighted. The shutters had not been removed, and when old Sol fled behind a cloud, darkness struggled with the day filtering through back windows. The dirty dining-table stood as before, blocking my entrance, its draggled cover pulled awry. But Felix no longer swayed behind it. The sense of space must have come from his absence — his and the rest of the sweet bunch! Neither drinks, nor cards, nor chips offered hospitality. The couch was empty of its swinish load. Sis had removed her hat and coat. Compared to the last set, this scene was a heaven of order.

My glance, eagerly growing accustomed to twilight,

wandered back over the table. Ah! Spread upon it lay a paper — yesterday's *Sun* — announcing in large type: DIAMOND SMUGGLER TRACKED, and right below this presenting the picture of the horse-faced man. Peach of a portrait, too! Felix's grim mouth, hawk beak and stony eyes to the life!

I went quickly forward. I felt at home and sure of myself now they were gone. I wanted to see that picture.

God! There on the floor, his body hidden by the dirty cloth, lay the man himself. An ashy human face stared up at me — the spittin' image of that newspaper face staring from the table — about the same color too! Cold fear clutched my heart. Did you ever in your dreams keep on standing in a spot you knew was hell, from lack of power to move away? I stood like that, watching his eyes glaze, watching him die. He plucked at the crex rug. He gurgled. His throat contracted. I thought he tried to say "Henri."

Beyond Felix lay the woman. She was prone, and differently dressed — neater — but I recognized her from her mop of red hair. Even in extremity I knew a sensation of thankfulness that her fat foolish face remained hidden. A little trickle of blood oozed out of her body. It started from underneath. It lengthened. It ran toward me — inexpressibly grewsome. Half lying myself, hanging on the table open-mouthed, gasping, I watched it, fascinated.

A revolver had fallen between them. I noticed a shred of bluish smoke floating in the heavy atmosphere hardly above the floor. It swirled weakly from corpse to corpse. The wraith of movement in this charnel galvanized me. I looked again, keenly alert. The

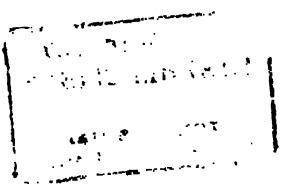
horror was brand new then! It must have happened while I sat watching on the dunes; admiring the silly cottage lost in a golden haze, a million sunbeams joining hands to drown it. No wonder the old chap had fled!

Theirs was an easy end to understand. Caught here he had stayed, hoping to escape the police. Peril sobered them at first, the house bore evidence of that. But they had quarrelled, crazed by confinement, weary of being shut away together in this god-forsaken place — with FEAR. How the news must have jangled his nerves! I remembered his bullying laugh, and her dreadful sarcasm. Had she been a member of the gang? The gang I was mixed up with! Or was she only his woman? Why in thunder did any man have any traffic with a grouch like her? Wondering, I straightened up. My mind was working and my heart-strings grew less taut. I breathed. I moved closer to the table, wanting to see, and my toe touched the sole of Felix's dead foot sticking beneath it.

Yell? I opened my head and let one holler out of me! The marvel is it didn't wake them! And then I ran. Gee whelikins! I fell down those cellar stairs. I ran as if fifty million devils were after me. I jumped straight into the middle of the bushes, and rammed right through, tearing and ripping the clothes off my back; satisfied with any conditions that put space between IT and me. There was no speed limit. I couldn't go fast enough. Once out of the gorse I flew down those rickety old plank walks like flame. And if the boat hadn't been there, I'd have licked clear on to Babylon.

But she was there, lying off the end of the pier, un-

An ashy human face stared up at me



moored, ready. Tom and Griggs had seen me coming.

I pounded over the boards and jumped in. I dropped dead on the floor. I had no wind, no words. My throat was parched, my lungs pumping. Conditions yelled at Tom to quit sudden. He turned her loose and sprang for the wheel. In a jiffy we were racing across the bay.

Those two were the sickest boys I've ever seen. You must remember Griggs had only heard a polite version of my last experience on the beach and Tom knew nothing about it. But the fact was perfectly evident that something terrific had happened.

"We shouldn't have allowed you to go!" Howard kept on repeating. "We shouldn't have allowed you. Damn this foot!" He got out the whisky flask and made me drink. He bathed my face and hands in cold sea-water. Both helped.

"What in the Sam Hill's wrong?"

"Murder!" I gasped. "Suicide!" I couldn't say anything more, just lay weakly with Griggs patting me and Tom steering up and down the bay not knowing where to go.

We dropped to low power and ran around heeding neither waves nor gale till I recovered breath and courage to tell them. I've never seen a human being more upset than Howard. Tom was silent till the last word.

"How long ago did this — this killing happen?"

"It came off now," I said. "Not ten minutes ago, not five. I saw Felix die."

"Did you know the fellow?" asked both amazed.

I shook my head. "That's his name. He's in the

paper — his picture. He's one of the diamond gang."

Tom whistled. His face fell into serious lines.

"I saw an old seaman scuttle past. Was it the caretaker? Jove! Clarissa, did he see you?" asked Griggs.

"I don't know. How can I tell? I saw him. Don't pester me with questions or I'll cry."

I'm not the crying kind so cataclysm indicated my limit. Howard began to pat me quietly, and Tom took command.

"Well, we'd better make tracks. We're too near this place for comfort. Townspeople have such glaring memories! Nevertheless I'm afraid we will have to storm the mainland. We can't go outside. I daren't attempt to run up against this sea. Guess we'll land at the public wharf and play it open. Hanging back won't do us any good. The *Swallow* is the only craft afloat here, and mighty conspicuous."

That was truer than he imagined. On the town dock we found a bunch of old tars, bay-men and loafers gathered to watch the speed boat doing her first flights up and down the harbor. Griggs with his lame foot, and me all in, as I was, we certainly looked a queer crowd to be wasting our time in such sport. And the story of our coming from Freeport by open ocean, a perfectly crazy lark in such weather, didn't help any. The crowd received us with incredulous stares. Had we laid ourselves out to attract attention we couldn't have planned better.

Tom inquired about the trains, and called a taxi.

"Been a bit too much for her," with a nod towards me, was the only comment he offered.

The local was full. We had difficulty in finding

seats, and I believe being up against it — having to hustle — was our best medicine. Griggs and I sat side by side, inefficiency making us feel like naughty children, while Tom superintended things from down the aisle.

The train crawled, stopping to take up the tracks and relay them at every crossroad. Her trip must have been timed to test the passengers' patience. Every five minutes she'd spend an hour anchored to some tiny cowshed. It grew hot, steaming hot. The air was rank. Not a ventilator open and the temperature overburdened with odors of humanity.

"I can't stand this!" I cried, rising to take off my coat. As my arms slipped out, something slipped on my shoulder — the camera case. The diamonds!

"Howard," I confessed, in a sepulchral voice, "I forgot to leave them."

CHAPTER XVIII

Two days later little Clarissa, all sunned up in a new suit and splendid spirits, sallied forth to visit Mr. Howard Horatio Griggs, to condone with him about a mysteriously wounded foot, and drink a cup of tea. The Swanhills were invited for form's sake. (After Griggsy and me kiting up to Canada through the lone dark night, without a thought of sin! Isn't it the limit?) Yet a bachelor apartment is a bachelor apartment, and that obscure remark " the higher the fewer " does not necessarily apply.

Conversation over a telephone is circumscribed at best, and our parting had left much to be said. So I arranged to go late, trusting the chaperones would leave early, determined to brave Mrs. G. and sit them out at a pinch.

Dear Aunt Elizabeth's ear-rings, furbished up by Tiffany, their original garnets replaced with pigeon bloods as big as cobblestones, had just come home. The designer claimed diamonds wouldn't have been fashionable in the old lady's time, and the reds were sweller — they were a swell price anyway! If he'd put twinklers in, I don't believe I'd have had the nerve to wear them, but as it was I hung the decoration on, and pranced. Savvy? It was my fell intention to make that Erma madder than a wet hen.

Her blessed brother played right into my hand at the start.

"You look so different, Miss Clarissa, awfully grown up. I don't believe I ever saw you wearing danglers before. Very becoming."

"The ear-rings," I laughed. "Old stuff. I don't sport them often, but I have an affection for them all the same. Great-grandaunt Elizabeth's wedding present." I made a courtesy in grand style and, unhitching one, handed it over for inspection. I wanted them to note the setting was genuine antique. Sister grabbed it instantly and began purring over the stone — anything to get next to Howard!

"I've often wondered what kind of a stock was up to producing Clarissa Kendall of Kendall Mine fame," Swanhill bantered, admiring, yet with a question tucked inside.

I smiled. "One of the great-grands held a command under Nelson"; (It was no lie either.) and added, "but my people didn't emigrate in the *Mayflower,* they were some punkins before that."

Griggs turned scarlet. Beaty laughed. And Erma slapped her furs around her neck quick, saying she'd have to leave — another engagement — the reliable old gag.

"Sit down, sis. Lots of time. We can miss a dance or two." He came around behind my chair. "What have you got here? Candy? I'm starving for candy." The great baby lifted a beaded bag that hung on the knob and commenced to pull its neck apart. His frank curiosity was rather attractive. I saw he would burn his fingers in a minute.

"Not so fast! Smarty! You'll be discovering all my secrets." My vehemence startled him. I snatched the bag which was really too large and bulky for aft-

ernoon use, and holding it securely, tried to laugh the incident off.

"How's rubber?" That was a safe subject to divert Mr. Broker Beaty, but it didn't work, not for a minute.

"Don't talk shop — not on a dandy afternoon like this," he began to jolly me. "Where have you been since a dog's age? I called twice. They hit me over the inoffensive cranium with a brick bat—'out of town.' Out of town, indeed! Why don't you give us warning? You certainly ought to leave me your address — on account of the market. Rubber's up — sky high. Better sell. Something might happen."

"Shucks!" I said. "Who appointed you my uncle Dudley? Let it happen."

"I believe you carry the midnight kit in that bead bag. Ah, it's hard! Not a negligée."

His fingers itched and I kept them itching. We bandied personal criticisms for a time, till Erma "really had to" and towed him away, unresisting and humble.

I rounded up Aunt Elizabeth's own, and Griggs sat watching me put it on.

"Jove! I don't see how you can look a jewel in the face — let alone hook it in."

"Hook nothing! It screws — see. One hole in anybody's ear is sufficient. You can go up head, Griggsy. You are learning the great American language."

"What have you done with the bally things?" he asked wearily.

"They're here." I swung the disputed bag. "Bought this yesterday at daybreak. I'm obliged to

carry them around. Wouldn't Swanhill have thrown fits, if he'd seen my brand of candy?"

"Have you ever taken a peep?"

"Nix! Why should I? Diamonds are diamonds, specially unset. And I never feel safe and sure alone in a hotel — the maids having pass keys and all."

"We're safe now. Jackson wouldn't dream of coming in, unless I rang. Let's look, Clarissa."

"Children cry for it," I said tossing over the bag. And he, bored and curious and idle, was as pleased as a kid with a new toy.

I didn't trust any person those days, so I locked both doors.

Stealthily, eagerly he pulled out the black case and opened it over my lap. A snowstorm of folded paper tumbled together. We grabbed one each and started unfolding. Now I'd begun, I was keener than he, and my fingers being nimbler I beat him to it.

"Look!" I cried, before I'd fairly looked myself. Our heads drew close. Instead of a bright tear-drop glistening on the paper we saw only a dull white pebble.

"In the rough. Always look like that, don't you know."

"'Tain't in the rough," I objected. "No rough about this. It's smooth as a job hunter. It's only a durned smooth freshwater pebble picked out of somebody's front walk!"

Griggs examined the stone. "I believe you're right," and opening his, exclaimed, "Here's another jolly little bounder!"

Working fast and furious we opened every paper, with a net result that wasn't worth five cents. We didn't find a single sparkler in the lot — just common

or garden pebbles. Stutz had handed me nothing. The gang had fought for a leather case, and lost their freedom for a song on the wild, black shore of Erie. Griggs had lain awake guarding vacuum, as values went, and I had been transporting a sample of the footpath on my sacred person. Gee! We gazed at each other dumfounded. And then a curious thing happened.

Without choice or intention I up and let them have it in the ripest volley of ripe oaths ever unloaded on New York. I consigned Jacobs to perdition, whole and in fractions, and mentioned half a dozen stopping places en route where he wouldn't need an arctic outfit. I named them over every one apart. I blistered him. I blazed. I blew up and descended in lava, and sank back on to my chair stuttering. Minor curses rose like smoke from an explosion. And all the time acute pain racked me to think that crafty Jew had put one over on Felix.

Griggs, rallying from his first shock, bounced for a pad and pencil and began taking notes.

When I had simmered down and sat glaring after the manner of an irate tiger, he tried to soothe me.

"Jove, this a sell! But it doesn't make the least difference. We've been at our wits' end to lose the bally things," he laughed. "It looks as if our troubles were over."

"If you think losing a fortune is anything to laugh at, you've got another guess coming," I snapped. "It's a crime."

Griggs made a note. He balanced himself on a Jacobean stool, nursing his game leg, and turned to me with an assumption of dignity quite out of class.

"Clarissa, it is a crime for you not to give Science a chance. This afternoon's — afternoon's excitement has been a magnificent display. I don't know that I have ever witnessed any exhibition I prized more. For five minutes you were completely under the influence of — your familiar spirit, if I may mention de Grasse so. Could Sir Gillespie have taken part —"

"Oh, cut it out! Science has got you buffaloed! Jacobs has got us all buffaloed!" I cried. "No wonder he showed me those empty closets, going to introduce me as evidence — make me swear to his childlike simplicity. What's the betting that he's got the loot?"

"I only hope he has," said Howard, thinking of Angelica. "We're a great deal better off as it is, old thing," were his words at parting.

A man had been waiting to see me — a long time, they said at the desk. And in the softly carpeted, roseately lighted corridor leading to my suite I found Tom Landy supporting the door jamb. His mood struck antagonistically against its surroundings from the start, as he said shortly:

"Afraid you'd come in and go out again, and I'd miss you."

And he didn't waste half a dozen words on politeness before he came to the point. "How would you enjoy a trip abroad — Europe, Africa, Australia? The farther the better."

"In the *Swallow?*" I queried laughing. "Let me order something for you, Tom. Waiting is a dry job."

But my buoyance broke to smithereens against his gravity.

"That interesting news item on the sand bar has

been uncovered. Babylon is crazy — everybody talking."

I was nonplussed. He stepped to one door after the other, glanced outside, and closed and fastened them. Even a matter of fact manner could not hide the suggestiveness of such actions. Then he sat on the edge of his chair, leaned forward, and talked earnestly in a low voice.

"Babylon is humming with the murder now, but up to seven o'clock this morning its wharf loafers talked of nothing but a certain black speedboat. Her having dared to run from Freeport by open sea, a craft of that size, so late in the year, too — the season long over and dirty weather almost certain. And the queerness of her having landed with a wounded man and a plumb scared girl on board. It doesn't take long for the dullest wits to hang a connecting link between these two sensations; particularly as they happened on the same day — or thereabouts. (The coroner's inquest will fix an exact date for the deaths.) Reporters on several sporting pages were down to see me and the *Swallow* yesterday."

"I planned to make boating a feature," I admitted weakly.

"It'll be featured all right! One tenacious fellow with a steel trap of a mind hung around to-day from twelve to two. If he isn't a detective I miss my guess!"

"Perhaps I'd better look up sailings and get some clothes —"

"Clothes!" he snorted. "You'd better get out quick!"

"But one can't travel without clothes — it would spoil all the fun —"

He looked at me open-eyed. "Say, Miss Clarissa, this isn't fun. Being arrested, even on suspicion, is no fun!"

"Arrested." My voice died in a dry throat. I swallowed. "They couldn't do it — they haven't any — any proof."

"How do we know what they've got? You were on the bar. You were right in the house at that very time, or mighty soon after. I don't know why you went there, and I don't want to know. Maybe you could explain it satisfactorily, but any chance of your having to do so in court is what we want to prevent. Arrest is a nasty business — it's a splash of indelible ink!"

His use of the plural unnerved me. Griggs — the honorable name of Griggs — would be dragged in the mud too, and the Terrier and Bully. "But isn't it foolish to run away — doesn't it make us look guilty?" I asked.

"We fouled our innocence by not reporting at the time. And in America, running is pretty good medicine. Public indignation is short-lived here. The police are pushing this case like fury, and it's being read and studied as few are, but the next excitement is sure to snuff out interest. Absence may save you a lot of annoyance — at the worst they'd have to locate you, and it all takes time. There's the old chap to reckon with too."

He drew a wallet from his inside pocket and handed me a paper clipping. An inconspicuous notice of an

old sailor being found in an open boat, out of his head from exposure, and taken to Bellevue Hospital.

"He could tell all about the murder, if it's the same man."

"Why should he tell — maybe he did it himself, and the surest way to get clear would be to have another suspected. He'd have everything to lose and nothing to gain in helping you — he'd never seen you before."

"Oh, yes, he had! I was there — not so long ago. He was nice, kind old chap, called me 'Missy' and said it was no place for the likes of me —"

Tom's face went white as a boiled shirt. He stared. "You didn't have anything to do with the gang, did you, Miss Kendall?"

"Good heavens, no! I never spoke to any of them in my life — except when I went out there for a lark. I just got in by chance — I didn't know what I was doing. You scare me, Tom, with your wild suggestions."

"Not as bad as you scared me," he answered. "We can't bank on the old fellow. Take my advice and cut it — get off under another name — lose yourself for a while."

"Is it as bad as that? I'll go. I'll do anything you say — only leave me now."

I shoved a roll of bills into his hand and shoved him toward the door. Henri and I had had all we could stand.

CHAPTER XIX

The steamship *Carbothia,* sailing from a Jersey pier at two o'clock next day, carried among her first cabin passengers a certain Mrs. J. J. Brown, who resembled Clarissa Kendall surprisingly: same latitude, same longitude, same weight to an ounce, same eyes and teeth and complexion, same voice, same laugh, even the identical clothes. Only a plain gold band encircling her third finger on the left hand gave sameness the lie. Had you been rushing forward to greet Clarissa, arms extended, and a gush about old times bubbling under your tongue, one glimpse of that band must have faced you about, feeling all sorts of a fool. Naturally, Clarissa Kendall wouldn't be wearing a wedding ring. Tom Landy had supplied the disguise along with my ticket.

Only one person came down to see Mrs. Brown off, and he didn't seem to have much to say to her. Embarrassed silence hung over them. Their thoughts were much too serious for words — in public; and each shivered in his shoes, secretly fearing an official interruption. But when the moment came, the youthfull widow shook her henchman's hand warmly, saying:

" Remember, Tom, you're in charge till I get back. I'll send my address. Take another job, if you need it to keep out of mischief, but you salary's doubled and will go on just the same. Good-by, and a thou-

sand thanks. Don't forget to call on Mr. Griggs this evening."

Whistles blew, kisses were smacked, embraces given, handkerchiefs waved. Stay-behinds hurried on shore. The *Carbothia* began to back out, separating loving thousands. A jammed pier-end became only less animated than her thronged rails. Aristocracy waved five-dollar cambric and fifty-dollar lace from her cabin deck, and farewells graded themselves suitably down to the steward leaning from a scullery port, chucking an orange peel at his best girl. A pretty scene, a lively scene, an exciting scene, one to which every good American looks either forward or back — born to be part and parcel of it. An opening scene which ninety-nine per cent. of a ship's passengers can bank on seeing, no matter what the state of their livers. Little Mrs. Brown, on her virgin trip, was the exceptional one per cent.

I waited not to single Tom's shoulders from the mass; to watch the Woolworth Building drape her head in mist; to serve my term at the writing desk, or sight Liberty lighting our outward path. I had already sighted a personality much more impressive, and, to me, confounding. Jim Gower, who for one fleeting night had been so gone on me, stood with a woman, not ten feet forward, absorbed by the passing show. He held her arm possessively, and from the childish face sunning itself in dimples, I guessed it was her maiden voyage too. With sarcasm priming memory I faded away into deep seclusion. It didn't take five minutes, going down the Hudson River in midstream, to prove Mrs. J. J. B. a rotten sailor. She undressed at once, and slipped into her berth. There

a husky stewardess found her in due time, clad in a crêpe nightie and a flowery cap, sleeping the sleep of innocence and great fatigue. From the shadows under her eyes "bon voyage" must have been a regular razzle-dazzle for Mrs. Brown — strenuous anyway!

"Humph," remarked the company's employee, quickly appraising my clothes and hand baggage. She sensed she was likely to find work in this room and figured the probable size of a hard-earned tip.

Packing an entire night on top of recent excitement had about finished me. For two days I lay a weary rag, cozening the Irishwoman's superior knowledge into voluble sympathy. But as my eyes brightened and my cheeks grew pink, helped by the strong salt air blowing into an open port, she waxed impatient.

"Are you minded to hug your cabin all the way to the auld sod? Sure, and it's the splendid weather we're havin'. You'd do finely on deck."

But Mrs. Brown continued to lie abed, eating like a wolf, devouring books between meals and limiting her chances of conversation to the attendance of Kathleen O'Doyle.

"Begorra, ye make me ashamed of my sex!" she upbraided. "There's anither of ye across the hall. Older than you by thirty year, but not a hap'orth spryer or a hap'orth more sick. Baroness von Rathgartz, they have her down. She don't look it — but thin she's only wan of them furrin quality — and what can you get from a hog but a grunt? It's the truth, I'm tellin' you. She hasn't had a blessed mouthful of fresh air yet. 'The sunlight hurts my eyes,' says she. 'Musha, you could be takin' a turn after dark,' I told her."

Mrs. Brown allowed the worthy tongue to wag, but took a cue from its advice. After that I spent an hour on deck each evening while the saloon dined and wined itself, Gower first to enter and last to leave, undoubtedly. By avoiding companionways and stealing up a little stair just near my own door, I managed to pass out unobserved, and enjoyed a grand trot around the deserted decks in perfect safety. Night after night old ocean rolled the same monotonous but charitable mood; tossing us lightly, regularly, on a lullaby swell. We were making a record voyage. Hardened travellers marvelled over our daily runs; the betting pool became a riot; but in fair weather nobody kicked at her driving ahead. Passengers began to congratulate themselves and each other on saving a day. The captain received their felicitation with reserve. He was not much in evidence. Men hit it off at shuffle-board, smoked and told stories. The women idled and enjoyed themselves, and also told stories. I felt as peeved over being out of it all, as the stewardess, who painted these delights, was with my laziness. But I continued to lie low till that fateful hour, throwing even the most supine of us into terrified action.

Stop here and mark a foot note on your memory-file. All this happened a decade ago. Quite before sea tragedy dropped to the level of the commonplace; before submarine commanders were iron-crossed for their glorious achievements in destroying women and children; before torpedo warfare had blazed a bar sinister on civilization's shield; before even the *Titanic* with her thousand victims, or that bit of Chicago carelessness with its nine-hundred-and-ninety-nine, had

electrified the world. We have learned to take our list of drowned now every morning at the breakfast table, very much as we take our cup of coffee, unemotionally counting the lumps of sugar fading into its dark depths. But in those days it was not so. Passengers claimed a certain amount of security when they embarked. They chose a first class boat on a good line and expected to be looked after. And they were preserved alive, mostly. Therefore the total destruction of the good ship *Carbothia* stood out largely in the headlines, and darkly in the hearts of New York. Newspapers went into mourning. Quite disinterested people wore a black ribbon. Crowds surged around the bulletin boards night and day. Loss of a passenger ship, with a name like Gower's heading the list of missing, was a stern, attention-compelling catastrophe then.

It stands out grimly in my mind's eye now; every detail black-faced, clear as a first impression.

We were steaming along at a good clip, not far off the coast of Ireland. It was early morning — about six, I fancy — not yet light. I had climbed up to take a look out of my port and get a breath of raw fresh air, and I stood planning the fun I would have on shore. I was fed up with rest and quiet now. Excepting that sprint on deck every evening I had taken no exercise for six days. Try it. Makes one boy-hungry for a lark.

While I was standing there, musing on the face of the gray waters, thinking of London and Paris, and the shops, she went off. Whoo —! Cripes! What a racket! Immediately a cloud of dense black smoke roared out of the front part of the ship. I waited to

see no more, but jumped for my skirt and coat, hanging right at hand, slung them on over my negligée, and dashed into the passage. The whole place was already in wildest disorder. Men, women and children poured out of their staterooms making for the main stairway, some of them not dressed at all, and everybody pulling and jostling and screaming. As I hesitated, calculating on the best chance, I heard cries from the berth opposite mine — the one where the Baroness, as reported, had loafed away her days. Say! I couldn't listen to a dog cry like that and not do something. I ran back to her rescue, flung the door open and stood petrified. There on the bed, half in, half out, lay Angelica Deering. No! Impossible! But it was the woman who had been hidden in Jacobs's secret room. I knew her. I couldn't miss. I recognized those fear-glazed eyes staring at me as they had stared that first time. She was scared now — more scared than on the former count. I'd have said she was worse frightened than anybody else on board. And I tell you some pretty ghastly faces had greeted mine in the hall.

"Help! Help!" the old thing called, without attempting to move or help herself.

There wasn't a minute to lose, a minute to reason. I hated her, but I couldn't leave a living soul to drown like a rat in a hole. I reached right across and yanked her out of bed by the breast of her stout flannel gown. She was absolutely numb with fear — whether of the accident, or of me, or of the blend I had no way to tell. I rolled a dressing robe, a soiled gray garment, around her, and seeing my enemy in its folds removed the last lingering doubt of her identity. Luck had

given me a chance to get even with her all right, but what did I care for the chance with the ship sinking under us a mile a minute. Luck and circumstances do pass the buck in private sure! Time was the only thing worth reckoning. We weren't set to compare notes or fill each other's ears with invective — not we! I gave her a shove towards the door. She cowered. I pushed, and seeing that was no use, dodged through myself and commenced to drag. She tore away from my grasp, and diving back, grabbed a bulky pocketbook from under her pillow.

"This must be saved! Must — must! It must be saved!" she whimpered. "I've been a bad old woman, and there's no use living — none at all if I lose it. And I have no safe place — no place!" All the time she was pawing over her dressing gown, trying to find a pocket that didn't exist. And all the time the ship was going down. Suddenly she held the wad to me crying:

"Take it — put it away — save it! Give it to me afterward — only save the key." I stuck the case into my Norfolk coat and hauled her out, now unprotesting. And all the time she muttered and wailed. "The papers — the key — the box at Schlossgartz. Fritz has the papers — my papers — my secret. My boy, oh, my boy! The little gray dispatch box. Save it!"

By this time Clarissa was entertaining qualms for her own safety.

The long passage leading from our doors had emptied. I saw a mob farther on, every man-jack of them crowding toward the main companionway. I saw we couldn't make it, and in a flash remembered the side

door I had used taking my little airings unobserved. A second later I had the old baggage faced about. How I managed to get her up the ladder Heaven only knows, for she was massive, though not stout, a half head taller than I and stupid from fright.

We did get up, and just in time, too. The water began to come in on our level a few minutes later. Most of the folks on the lower deck were drowned.

The coal had been burning for three or four days; good reason for our jamming ahead breaking all records. Our captain set shifts to fight the fire and kept the danger to himself fearing panic among his passengers. Aside from the risk of accumulated gas exploding, a fire in the coal bunkers isn't half so infrequent nor half so terrifying as one might suppose. Our crew had discovered the source and location of the mischief, and had the fire in hand. We were making smart time in wonderful weather. With just a little luck all would be well. Nevertheless captain and purser wore troubled faces; mindful of the high explosives invoiced in her cargo. The only outward sign of this situation was the lifeboats ready swung over the water; and such is the sloth of idle brains, after they had been carried that way for twenty-four hours, even the most curious ceased to bother. As I had been told, everybody was enjoying himself to the hilt.

Then suddenly, before the cock crew on our last day out, a pocket of the foul gas blew off. Nothing to worry about in itself, that little explosion, if it hadn't started the combustibles in her hold.

Nobody knew these facts during the reign of terror; nor stopped to care nor to inquire as they were

vomited forth from the ship's interior, or held below, a seething, striving, obstructive mass. I realized then only what I saw as we climbed to the boat-deck: the front of the vessel burning and settling, with a heavy pillar of smoke blowing away from her. A splendid sort of funeral plume waving the last journey for many human souls.

At the top of our ladder Grandma and I came out almost opposite a lifeboat. The chief officer stood calmly at his post loading folks into it.

"Room for one more!" his stentorian voice bellowed.

A worm sprang forward and was hauled back. Dozens of hands clutched him. Fists doubled themselves in defence of the world edict. Threats were shaken in his face. I rather pitied the poor thing that wanted most to live. Hisses started and dropped, spurted here and there venomously, fainted, died away. The officer glanced in our direction. I shoved the Baroness toward him, and two husky sailors lifted her in. They'd have glammed me also, I being the only other female in sight. But I backed off. The boat was full. Henri is a sane coward. His male instinct preferred to take its lone chance outside. Hardly were the old thing's skinny legs hidden by the gunwale when the ropes began to strain on their davits and run out. They ran out, but they ran wrong. First one rattled free, so that the boat was all down in her stern, then the front jerked even, pitching its occupants topsy-turvy. Then both ripped along together. The crew seemed absolutely unable to hold her weight back. Tarred hands hung on till the ropes

burnt, till they lost control of her altogether. The big boat, loaded to capacity, hit a mounting swell ker-flop and keeled over.

Those of us left on deck breathed soft prayers of pity — prayers for ourselves inclusive. The man who had been mauled out of her commenced to cry childishly. I lie awake nights now when I think of that scene, but at the moment it struck me like a moving picture. I blessed the darkness in the house half hiding it. Hands and arms and legs all flounced in the sea together, trying to get themselves righted and not considering anybody else's chance till they made good on their own. Some were content to hang to the boat, while others fought to climb on top; and one fierce, crazy vampire mounted astride her keel worked like a nailer shoving the rest off. De Grasse and his gang stripped me stark of confidence, but I've still enough faith in human nature to believe she thought, in her blind confusion, she was helping to save souls.

I gazed down thrilled and fascinated, not realizing the truth of their being alive. All the time my eyes subconsciously hunted for Jezebel's gray thatch — but never glimpsed it. She must have gone down like a bullet, unable to take her own part, doomed by the excess of her numbing fear.

By and by, it seemed hours but may have been a couple of minutes, a man passed me. Folks had all moved along by then, storming the remaining boats, and this fellow was so struck by my standing there, watching, when I had every chance of shooting to destruction myself next thing, that he pulled up short.

"Aren't you thinking about saving yourself?"

"See what comes of trying!"

His glance followed my pointing arm. The wickedness of their fight had ceased. Most of the feeble were gone for good — dramas of life and death in an ice-cold sea move quickly. The upturned boat wasn't any worse to look on now than panic-torn groups to right or left.

"Bad management. Nothing in order. Inexcusable — but it's always the same."

"I think the officers are mighty cool and collected."

"It looks as if our future destinations depended entirely on our past lives."

That was my cue for a stare. The idea of any one being able to josh at such a time, and standing himself in the very same make of shoes. Perhaps, though, it was nerves. I recollected nerves acted odd in certain constitutions. His bulky shoulders hunched beside me, glooming through blackish dawn, appeared to be quite controlled — almost at ease. And his next sentence gave the lie to fright.

"You talk more like a man than a woman. If you're not hysterical, come along with me, and we'll have a try for a whole skin anyway. Up there, behind the bridge, is a pile of rafts. I've smoked on them every evening. Not a soul thinks of those rafts — and wouldn't go for them if they did. They're clean daft — scared of the fire — packing aft as tight as sardines." He paused to eye the listing deck.

"The *Carbothia* 'll sink before she burns. We can sit still on our perch and the waves will wash us off as she settles."

His crisp assurance carried hope with it. For the first time I felt a wild desire to live. I grasped the probability of coming through alive, as he fed it to

me, and joy must have brightened my countenance. The man smiled.

"You'll do," he commented. "Up the bridge ladder — nothing's forbidden now!"

We turned our backs on the tortured mob and scurried aloft. The captain, who stood at his post — grown an old man in ten minutes — saw what we were after and nodded approval.

"I wish the people had more horse sense."

It was then he told us about the coal, ending with reassurance.

"The water has put out the fire already, and the pumps are working — have been right along. They'll keep her afloat for a margin of time. We have been in close communication with other vessels during the last three days. Their ear is open for our S. O. S. If you can manage to hang on to your raft help won't be long coming.

"I wish you luck," he added. And we would have wished him the same — but his face forbade it.

My heart sank when I saw the unwieldy thing — a straw between us and destruction. But I turned in vigorously to help free her. And once she was loose we sat down side by side.

"Look around now for the best hold you can get, for you'll need it when the swirl comes."

We picked and planned against the deluge, and then sat erect, our hands firmly clasped together; for, although he was a stranger, that childish attitude brought me into touch with human strength. I badly needed bucking up. The man neither by word nor glance gave hint of fear. His attitude was not whistling to

keep his courage alive. He simply did not concede the desperateness of our straits.

"Are you a Christian Scientist?" I asked, suddenly overcome by an idea that he must be pretending. No person could actually feel unafraid!

He laughed. "C. S. doesn't interest me any more than Ibsen interests me. Man's brain's a dynamo of power all the same. Send out your signals the way you want facts to hang. Be practical in emergency. If mind doesn't control matter, it at least controls other minds. See what comes of letting imagination sparkle — as you told me."

He indicated the tempest below. We got a bird's-eye view of the scene, and a notion of our own position. The ship was listing something awful.

"We might fancy ourselves sitting in two deck chairs," I said. "Only the vessel doesn't rock up again."

"That's better! I knew you were plucky. Now give over worrying about the passengers. Remember those who ought to be saved will be saved. Forget them and think entirely about us."

Henri de Grasse was fired with kindling joy in this man's mood, but it rather appalled Clarissa. How cruel he could be — how ruthless — evolving his doctrine of SELF! As if to contradict my unexpressed doubt, he asked kindly:

"You're not afraid of the water?"

"Afraid! I'm shivering in my shoes. I'm shivering literally and figuratively. But I can swim. Can you?"

"Swimming's my second name. My last is Duffy.

Constant effort of little Willie — my first name's William — to keep it from being spelt with a final r."

"Oh," I said, nonplussed.

He waited expectantly.

"I should think you'd succeed." It was a lame finish, but he forgave the pause.

"You bet! I always succeed. Nothing succeeds like success. Maybe you fancy it's late for introductions, and that names don't count here. Stop thinking — you never can tell, anyway. There's a whole lot in names. I don't know yours. I figured the list out — but you haven't been on deck. Where have you kept yourself hidden? If I'd seen you about, we'd have become acquainted earlier. I always know what I want."

The man's cheek stunned me, but I was cool enough now to diagnose the symptoms. "He's overdoing nerve," I thought, "that's it. Playing for self-control and sane action when the test comes." With Henri admiring him so much I couldn't absolutely freeze, and besides I found a sort of reflex dare-devilish bravery springing from his attitude.

"I've been in bed most of the time."

"Sick! On a flat voyage! You don't look it — why nobody's been sick! This is some cure for sea-sickness!"

I disliked his scoffing — disliked the threatened cross-examination, and to avoid it said, quickly,

"What's become of Gower?"

"Golden Gizzard! Do you know him?" He queried, a new note in his voice.

"Yes."

There was a pause. With Duffy's next remark his

tone changed again. Its sharp penetrating alertness had melted to tentative suggestion. Nothing definite, yet enough to rile me.

"He has a girl along."

"Indeed. I have not spoken to Mr. Gower on the trip," I answered frigidly.

"My mistake."

I felt we were drifting apart — far, far apart, although our fingers intertwined. A sense of loss, terrible and tragic, overwhelmed me. If the crazy, impudent human comforter failed, where would I be? How would I come through alone? — Alone! Why once the ship sank, if our raft survived, the entire frantic pack below, whose crying we heeded now no more than the din of a distant elevated, would be on our backs, desperate to crowd us from our few feet of well-earned safety. I remembered the witch astride a keel working to shove others off. Terror surged in me. I clung to Duffy. I lifted my eyes to heaven appealing to Something somewhere in the universe — a Something all powerful and steady. Low on the horizon lay a shaft of chill, pale yellow, outlining an ocean undulant and gray. My eyes swept the world claiming help, hope, to face the nightmare death. And as I looked, suddenly the sun's rim sprang above that steely girdle flooding the mad scene in ruddy beams.

I turned to my companion. I saw him for the first time.

He was less than thirty and splendidly built, wearing only a blue coat and trousers, without collar or polite embellishment — almost a bathing suit effect. Clear gray eyes gazed level into mine, and his hair rose straight on end from a high, flat brow.

"Hello!" I cried, surprised out of my hereafter mood. "Didn't you race a black speedboat off the Jersey coast last summer?"

"Tried to, yes. How do you know about it?"

"I was at the wheel. That's the only craft she ever saw the heels of."

"Quitter!" he jeered, with a flash of memory making de Grasse bow down and worship.

"And she wouldn't have seen yours," I blazed, "if my man had done as he was told."

Duffy laughed, revealing perfect teeth, even, strong, white, cruel — I noted them, thinking of his preachment, and observed the calculating satisfaction which overspread his features.

"A great day! I admired the young lady more than I can tell — or I wouldn't have invited her to lunch — I never waste myself. I feel sure a girl like her can come out of this little affair O. K. If she does — if we do — will you promise to give me another chance — in a longer race?"

"You don't waste time either, do you?"

"I always know what I want the minute I see it. And as for wasting opportunity — wasting anything. What's the use?"

Again I gazed open mouthed. What was the man's game? Was he having a frolic with me, a blasphemous, exciting frolic in words to hold our hearts steady amid the weltering flood now rising swiftly? Pride forbade me to miss a trick.

"What's the use of proposing to a woman that's all aboard for kingdom come?" I gulped. The water was beginning to lick my feet. Cold feet! Gee!

"You don't believe you are going to die," he replied

firmly. "And I only ask for a chance. Will you?" He shook free of my hand clasp and clutched the raft as a big wave mounted. "Will you?"

"Yes! Ouch!" A ravenous lump of fluid ice poured round me. "What do we do next?" I gasped.

"Sit tight — and hang on!" He did not offer to weaken his own position by lending a helping hand.

The raft lay on a horrible incline. It was all we could do to cling to her. Then quite unexpectedly she began to regain equilibrium, to float off. The waves caught her, raised her and washed her clear of the ship.

"Worked. Didn't it?" the man shouted.

We filled our lungs with a great breath and hugged the planks while amid a perfect turmoil of waters the old *Carbothia* sank. Were we unconscious or only lost momentarily in a strange world of spars and fishes? The raft whirled dizzily, was sucked under, thrown up again, tipped and bucked and twisted, but with an oiliness of motion that failed to break our death grip. In the end I was amazed to find myself alive and unharmed, lying face to the boards, as our raft lay on the bosom of the swell.

I sat up and gazed around. The sea looked so empty! The sky was blotched with a huge presentment of Henri's winged snake, and schools of young galoshes swam in azure blue. Onslaught from behind made me collect my wits. The whole ocean seemed alive, swarming with would be destroyers. We hadn't expected to hog our safe quarters, but we did intend to keep afloat, and I knew now the necessity was going to call for moral courage of another brand. Women and children clung to us — what's to be done

CHAPTER XX

Clarissa's earliest clear impression of being rescued, was lying snug in a woolly blanket in somebody's berth; and hearing a strange doctor say to a strange attendant,

"She'll do very well now."

I didn't bother to speak. I gave them the glad eye for a minute and sank immediately unconscious again — this time into sleep.

The next thing I knew I was wide awake, sitting bolt upright, clamoring for food.

Soup and a ship's officer came along together. Perhaps it was haste, the pressure of contemporaneous events which led me into crime — the fall itself smacks of de Grasse — anyway, they wanted my name and all that — facts, facts, and the heathen starving! Between mouthfuls I bit back "Kendall" on an honest tongue. Von Rathgartz sprang to my lips, and without a pause to reckon cost or privilege, I opened up and let her fly. A serious minded man wrote the title in a serious list of survivors — I had burnt my bridges!

Of course I carried the old woman's papers, and there wasn't a scrap, not even a name in the passenger list, to prove anything on Mrs. Brown. I allowed her therefore and from henceforth to fade into black oblivion — one more victim of a noble wreck.

Prevarication sat lightly upon me. I was feeling fine, delighted to hear we had sailed into the Thames,

and all agog to go on deck. The Roman nosed matron, however, whose bunk I filled, received this suggestion with a wide bias of disapproval; stating positively that my clothes weren't fit.

I laughed. "You can't expect to be tailor's model after your coat has soaked in brine and dried in the boiler room."

But she was adamant; and as there are worse things than a mother's touch after battle, fire and sudden death, I remained cheerfully in seclusion, awake all night, counting the sights I could see through my porthole.

My newly adopted proved so strong on propriety and so weak where it came to preferring herself before others — notably me — I was thoroughly amused as well as bemused. I failed to get her measure at all, till she brought her daughters, weedy girls in blue serge, to be presented to the Baroness.

Gosh! Other people were going to make me live up to that title!

"You've been and gone and done it, Clarissa," I told myself. "Absconding like a queen of melodrama, with the spotlight turned upon your exit. Hasn't Henri warned you many times and oft? Didn't faithful Tom lead you gently to the fountain head of lost identity? Recollect his words. 'Safest name on earth — drab as a city sparrow. Wise guys picking it up in a register pass the wink — but at the same time there's the ghost of a chance of having been born Brown.' Apologies, Tom. You can sure lead a donkey to the trough, but you can't make her learn."

From my inside knowledge I judged the original Baroness might have been fleeing too, and I panted to read

her private correspondence. My plans were vague but comprehensive. First to know where the old lady had been expected — and then to travel in a far direction. For the moment even so much was held in abeyance. Mrs. Higsbie had given my pocketbook to the purser, so she said, and no amount of pleasant asking egged her up to getting it again. Confusion bore the blame, but I verily believe she held it back as a guarantee of chaperoning me on shore and thus cementing social friendship; her imagination grasped tenaciously the God-given chance — everything else would be according to my least suggestion, as became a High-and-Mightiness. Therefore the excellent lady removed my valuables with one hand and offered me her best boots with her other. I had no choice but surrender. Shoes on my feet might lead to a noose about my neck — a Baroness in stockings was ridiculous.

Three items stand to my London credit. I examined the von Rathgartz papers, wrote a bulletin to date for Howard, clearing Angelica and exonerating the classic name of Griggs, and bought rubber. The boom was nearing its zenith. Sitting in a broker's office watching yourself grow richer by hundreds of pounds every hour is some fun — Henri thought so! We went batty about rubber. I cabled Swanhill to sell railway and steel stock, and we bought our beans off.

That's about all I saw of the smoky city. We carried away a very happy impression, but, nevertheless, it's Paris for mine! Her lure got me in Bain & Dingley's. Every girl behind a counter sees golden halos ringing the magic word. Most of them would have called it a toss between Paris and heaven — with long odds on Paris as a temporary choice.

Considering the way we fitted in, Henri must have spent a lot of time and money in the French capital previous to my acquaintance. For a week he let me riot, then tired of dissipation, we shut our purses, opened our eyes, and I really began to enjoy the place. "Whence her charm?" I asked myself. "Our shops are as smart and larger; our women are as beautiful and larger also; our traffic is as congested and noisier; our opera as excellent and more expensive; our everything much, oh, much more expensive — yet we don't get the rhythm." In the end I answered with a truism — Paris is inhabited by Frenchmen. Music throbs in a Frenchman's pulse, gaiety twitches his toes — Henri's twitched me through some odd corners out of sympathy, but he surprised me so much in other matters he selected to enjoy — such as picture shows — I forgave him all past issues.

I couldn't guess whether my second was lying low for more mischief, or, now that he had money to burn, would be content with living as a gentleman. The untimely end of the Baroness von Rathgartz had taken a reef in our vengeance. De Grasse had been wildly excited over the idea of reading her papers; at least I blamed it on him, but maybe I'm the romantic chump. Anyway somebody worked us into a fine heat about nothing — for that's what it proved to be — the key, a letter of credit, and a bunch of family documents. The old sinner was far too cute to commit herself in black and white. And I decided to take a leaf out of her book. The papers which were of an intricate character proved a dozen living interests, and with them was one sheet closely written in Yiddish. Not daring to have it translated, I regarded the latter as an inno-

cent person might look on the outside of a time-bomb, not knowing whether it was set; and, when the chance offered, I threw the whole lot into the Channel. Let her affairs drown with her — their proximity made me jumpy. By way of souvenir I kept the key and the old woman's words reverberating in my ears. A Fritz, a Schlossgartz, and a little gray dispatch box existed somewhere — but Henri didn't show the slightest interest.

Instead of ramping off on this fresh trail, de Grasse seemed bent on offering himself as a sacrifice; he laid himself out to perfect me. We went to the corsetière's together, we progressed from shop to shop — I was never so happy before. We studied the thing at hand and improved upon it; our equipage began to occasion remark. Then he whispered in my ear the necessity of a maid.

"Nothing doing," I said. "You ought to know I don't like being pawed over."

"You have never been touched by experienced hands — ah, exquisite! There is just the person —"

"Shut up!"

It beats the Dutch how, if you ever start talking about a luxury, some darned fool extravagance you don't half want, that thing will nag at you until it grows to be a vital need. Henri commenced to point out the difference between my hair and the heads surrounding us at the opera. I capitulated, and I must confess, though I did pretty well in hats, the smartest of all my investments in Paris was Annette — small, dark, distractingly lovely, and as dishonest as it is possible to be and keep out of prison. Adopting an orphan from the

Carbothia would have been play compared to undertaking such a spark.

From the moment her trim high-heeled shoe stepped over the threshold she became my cricket on the hearth. Bright eyes, light words, coquetry and grace awaited Madame's coming. She was equally happy to occupy the front seat of the touring car, or to walk a couple of paces in the rear exercising Mimi-Frou-Frou, the latest addition to our family. And the way that girl made me look — the way she turned me out! I had simply never been dressed before, my clothes had been pitchforked into place. She grafted more distinction on to me in five days than I could have achieved alone in as many centuries. If you want to be a perfect lady, get a perfect maid.

Everything was running on ball bearings till one morning I dashed into the salon, and discovered the beautiful creature in the arms of the valet de chambre. Of course, it was my fault, as she tactfully explained; I should have given her warning. All the jealousy Henri is capable of rushed to my temples. I stormed — I reproved, while Annette continued to look plaintive, thoroughly satisfied with herself and her late position: "What would I wish — hein?"

De Grasse wished but one thing — to separate her from the valet. We moved and peace reigned for the moment.

Unfortunately the night clerk was a personable young man with too many daylight hours hanging idle on his hands. We changed our address again. Next time it was the waiter who mounted my little breakfast. Fearing the first class hotels wouldn't be numerous

enough to stand the racket I grew crafty. I left doors ajar, I pounced upon her in unexpected places. And for my pains I learned Annette's waking hours were one triumphal progress of flirtation. She flirted with my chauffeur, a respectable married man; she flirted with the footman till I fired him. She made eyes at the proprietor and caressed the bell-boys. She lingered before the statue of Apollo, admired the dummies in a tailor's window, and even tried to cajole *Le Penseur.* There was nothing for it — we must leave Paris. The idea of giving up Annette never entered my head, so I arranged to take the night train south.

My maid was delighted. Her last mistress had wintered at Nice. "Ah! It was such a beautiful place, Nice! Would Madame expect her to travel second?"

No. Madame wouldn't. "You're bunking right alongside me, Annette, and with the doors open so I can keep my eye on you."

"Excellent, Madame."

CHAPTER XXI

From the day Charley Ross paid me over my share of the Lelland purchase, I had felt a sneaking desire to go to Monte Carlo; and now, although the labels on our fifty trunks advertised Menton, I knew without asking where we would alight. The thought of baccarat was to de Grasse like a red rag to a bull, or male attire to Annette, so scenting the battle from afar we landed in the gambler's heaven.

Never having seen any tropics, except New York in summer, Monaco thrilled me. I adored the blueness of the blue and the greenness of the greenery. And say! It's some town for spending money! Only the cream de cream in the shops — not a scallop, not a button, not a shade but makes one's teeth water. After a dull winter in the north, color and light went to my head. I wallowed by day, and Henri wallowed at night, spurred on by a persistent run of luck. We broke about even. Every centime flowing in to him across the tables flowed back to doll the Baroness!

Position, easy money, and Annette's finish on the article introduced me to the limelight. I was talked of — my aura permeated — soon I found myself in a delightful eddy with a lively group supporting a certain Mrs. Sue Mainardy and Sue's husband — Americans living abroad, Baltimore originally, but now nearly Europeanized. I liked them, man and woman, as well

as any harnessed team I've ever met. Their long suit was low voices, elegant manners, and any amount of sophistication. But a blue-eyed kid niece gave her elders away right and left. She was a riot, and Henri and I loved her. We loved them all.

One evening, the Mainardys and our bunch had ventured their last louis and were fixing to depart. Very late it was, already play had stopped except on the table by which we stood. All at once the doors opened impressively from without. An amazed few of us turned to see who came so late. The instant's expectation needed only an event to make it most dramatic, and then, as if to crystallize the moment, a voice called boldly from the threshold,

"*Banque!*"

"*Est-il possible? Ces Américains!*" murmured a princeling, while I stood staring at the new comers, open mouthed.

The taller gave one an impression of a walking skeleton. He must have been near seventy. Excessively smart clothes contrived to hang loosely over his bony frame without sacrificing a jot of style. He carried himself very erect, but his cheeks sagged, and the flesh wrinkled at his Adam's apple. He wore a monocle, grimly refused to acknowledge the claims of a gouty foot, and twisted the long ends of his moustaches with crumpled fingers. I don't believe I ever saw him — and I learned enough of him later, heaven witness — when he wasn't nervously twirling or twisting something. From watery eyes half hidden under heavy lids, this old fossil regarded the room with cold, ironical humor.

His companion — the man who had called ***banque,***

thereby taking to himself without inquiry the full chances of the table — was William Duffy.

He made directly toward me, hands extended like a bosom friend, and his voice which had boomed above the waters, fairly bellowed in the spacious chamber.

"Well met! Well met! Little Willie had a notion we might run across each other hereabouts. Mark it! — I'm never wrong. But I've been to America and back since parting. Not my fault. They just took me. What did I tell you? Those that ought to be saved will be saved — in spite of themselves, ha, ha! Much gold wouldn't turn her face towards Mecca, so I looped the loop to Jersey, and once on Uncle Sam's sod, business nailed me. That's why I haven't yet handed in my card for entry." He glanced at the men assembled. "I do it now though — on the minute. This race looks like crowding at the post. Ha, ha!"

I was overwhelmed with embarrassment. What would Sue Mainardy think of such a rank home product? What would she think of me? At least he represented her America as much as mine! It was up to her to help. I hadn't a ghost of a chance to cut Duffy. He was too darned sure of himself. His entrance had made an impression, and his jubilance rather took. Everybody turned to watch. Moreover he was keeping the game waiting.

"I'm no quitter, you'll find out. And I've a long start on some — eh? No time for fooling at that! Precious lucky we dropped in here to-night. We might have missed you. My chum said it was too late, but I said, 'Not a bit of it. Get into your glad rags and hop along,'— and here we are. We'd just arrived from Genoa by motor, and my friend —"

Remembering the claims of comradeship, he nipped his story in the bud. "Where is he? — Ah, let me present my friend! Shake hands with the Baron von Rathgartz."

* * * * * * * *

The stars are what I saw!

Duffy loved a title. His clear utterances sent "Baron" ringing to the rafters; and from an immense distance I heard it thrown back. Sound rained upon me, crashing in the ruins of my house of glass.

The aristocrat folded himself over in a low obeisance, and chattering teeth hummed an accompaniment to my stunned salute.

Was this her husband? — MY HUSBAND?

Crude instinct bade me fly — vanish — skidoo. I cared not whither — through the floor or upward. All routes looked alike and welcome. I reckoned time and distance for a sprint to the door, and our relative strategic positions. While I was thus mentally engaged, reason flashed me her S. O. S.— Duffy didn't know my name! In spite of blatant fellowship, he knew no designation for me real or false. His opening impertinence remained unanswered, thanks to Tom, and I had not told him when he hinted on the raft. The odds were all against his having found opportunity, amid the hammer strokes of business in America, to look me up. My plight, therefore, became a question of skating over thin ice. It was a delicate situation indeed — one to be carried by cool nerve. With alertness and ready turns of phrase, giving the Baron no chance to put in an oar, I might get the introduction over, make them all acquainted with each other, and make good my escape. We need not meet again. Set-

tling with Sue and society would be a good twelve-baskets full left from this little love feast, but once out of here the fragments would at least lie scattered.

Sheer relief at this remembrance bowed my lips and sent loud laughter reverberating through the room. Sue started. Duffy beamed. My mirth rang hollow death blows on good taste, but noise assured him of a conquest.

Thought moves quicker than a clock-tick. After these mental gymnastics I opened my mouth to continue the proceedings hitchless — and shut it again. For at that minute, the kid's voice, youthfully raw, treacherously keen, rising like a boy soprano's high above the limit of suppression, sang a tardy echo of the stranger's final word.

"Von Rathgartz! Baron von Rathgartz? Say! She's the Baroness von Rathgartz. They must be married!"

In the profound hush following, the monocle of my aristocratic spouse was heard to clatter on his waistcoat buttons. Surprise had twitched it from its socket, but with admirable presence of mind he let her swing, pretending to have shed the bauble by an act of will, and dropped his eyelids ambushing expression.

I drew my chin to the fighting level. One way of showing fear if they had known, but indignation seemed more meet. My impulse passed for hauteur. It worked havoc with the old boy. Smiting his hand hard where anything but a skeleton would have had a stomach he doubled in a spasm, a record-breaking bow, murmuring of "the honor."

"A landslide!" chirped the matchmaker.

"An uncommon name," somebody suggested.

The Baron bowed again. "Most uncommon," he answered in excellent English. "Madame and I are the last of the line."

How much did the inclusion indicate? "Oh, why in a city of forty-five million, oh, why do you pick upon me?" I whistled the air between clenched teeth. No, I couldn't have whistled that air because it wasn't written then, but I whistled the miserable idea, while his Nibs regarded me with knife-blade penetration.

He was manager. He was handing out the parts — rôling the cast in topsy-turvydom. I realized he spotted me for an impostor, and he knew that I knew he knew. The fear of his breaking loose, doing or saying something to give me dead away, had passed. I saw he was a different type. A man rooted and grounded in forms and ceremonies — not one to make a scene, nor one to leap before looking. Up to the present he had neither acknowledged nor denied me. And I felt sure he would avoid the issue until he became perfectly certain on which side his greatest advantage lay.

Assured the lion wasn't crouched to leap, I instantly became aware of pussy's claws. The Mainardys had faded to a safe and inconspicuous distance. My Princeling suitor, endeavoring to gather penciled eyebrows across a stormy front in dreadful anger, was so preoccupied with the part he forgot me. Duffy had already joined the tables, and the Terror, highly satisfied with her recent discovery, had followed to watch his luck. So long as that determined young person stayed we were bound to chaperone — at least Sue was, and I wouldn't quit till my cue. I was equally scared to show fright by running away, and scared to linger

on. Small fry talked to me, sifted through and joined the Baron. No one seemed anxious to mark our separation openly, nor yet at ease while including both of us in the same pocket of conversation. Evidently he and I had quarrelled. We were mismated; we were surprised to meet — they drew their own conclusions. Imagination outran facts, and cackle grew desultory. In spurts wit lashed itself to frenzied nothings. But when the game broke up, and Duffy's boom arrested everybody's speech, men and women expanded their stays with a huge sigh of relief.

William Watson had won, and true to his country's form desired to put up the drinks. He must treat. Natural crassness fired by success helped him to knock out such little obstacles as other people's mental comfort on the first round, as though he had been swatting flies. He must treat! Yes. Yes! He must treat the whole crowd! We must drink our safe preservation — his and mine. He commenced to tell the story of the wreck, and interrupted it to form his party. We must drink his winning! Not to celebrate success would foul the luck to-morrow. There was no gainsaying the man.

Personally I trembled to refuse and perhaps put the Baron's back up. Sue had tried to pry her responsibility loose and failed. The kid stuck a hand under Duffy's arm, and his closed over it. Hangers-on, of both sexes, watched the cat jump with satisfaction, glad to get a supper at anybody's expense.

We were no sooner in the restaurant than a game of tag began around the table. Duffy wanted a place by me. Grass-widowhood, or divorce, or genteel indifference — however you figure the von Rathgartz family

situation — didn't phase him — not a little bit. The Kid had gone dippy about William Watson and showed it, stalking his every motion. Principality and Power, represented by the fair and perfumed males, always fought over Clarissa; and she in turn was actuated by a single thought — to camp beside Sue's precious squab and kick her young shins black and purple at her first hint of springing any more matrimonial agency stuff.

A man ought to know his limit. Duffy had calculated his early in life, and not yet reached it. Along the lines of giving a dog his due he can reap special bouquets for carrying that party on the crest of a tidal wave. If noise is any symptom of joy, our spirits touched delirium. The Baron devoted himself to Mrs. Mainardy. Common decency had placed us far asunder, opposite in fact, and each time I chanced to glance that way, I caught the face of his monocle glaring at me. Perhaps it was only a trick in reflected rays, but it looked mighty like the evil eye. I shuddered. He was so concrete, so indisputable, so much cock of the walk. I felt myself shrinking visibly. My courage oozed, the shoes pinched. I'd eaten my cake and was about to experience the consequences, and, like Alice, I longed to cry.

Von Rathgartz sat amid the maze of tinkling brilliancy devouring food and considering me off hand, as a big, black, leggy spider might king it in his web, saying to the insect already caught, " Stay put, nice little juicy fellow. I'll have plenty of time to attend to you later."

That wasn't the phrase he entangled me with when the party dissolved — but it may as well have been. He was the first to go and made his bow before two

dozen searching eyes. What choice had I, but acquiescence to his purred request.

"Madame will grant me the family privilege of calling?"

Noncommittal! Yes. And not a touch of supplication in the asking. His tone was neither more nor less than a pleasant statement of fact. All very polished and agreeable, till one caught the smug grin stretched tight-lipped upon a smoker's teeth, half hidden by his drooped moustache.

CHAPTER XXII

I beat it to my own room and threw myself across the bed, soul sick in consternation.

"Family privilege of calling!" How about it? What in thunder was the old chap's game? To pass me as his wife? Ridiculous! Through claim of kinship to draw down the ready? It must be money, but how could a stranger know my circumstances. Ah! Was the man a stranger? Why had he come and where had he bagged Duffy? William Watson showed all the earmarks of an easy capture. He fell-in for the asking, but the other walked with circumspection and design. Was he the big stick in Samuel Jacobs's hand? If so, I risked my neck by staying. Suppose I left suddenly — now — between two days? But where would I go? What sanctuary offered for a fool adventuress masquerading under stolen honors? Was ever any woman thing in such a mess! And in Monaco — where even suicide is counted as an incident!

If the Baron was Jacobs's man, he would weasel me out, run me to earth in every port as he had holed me here; and doubtless he would blast my reputation first among my friends. A false name is a bad affair — but oh, you little title! It had not been my intention to collar social prestige under wrong pretenses — I had passed as a huge joke to myself — but who would believe me? Not the sophisticated, world-wise Maimardys.

What crazy gain had Henri hoped to win by snatching that old crook's identity? And why, if I kept her name, hadn't I held on to her papers? The Baron had something on me sure; with that yellow sheet to hold above his head I might have had something on him.

I suddenly sat erect.

"Fritz"— was his name Fritz? — and "Schlossgartz!" Memory turned on a great white light; my imagination flamed over the past and future. I sprang off the bed, fumbled for my jewel case, and made certain the little key was safe. The key to the actual box in the actual castle — the key to their secret. But was it his secret? Had it anything to do with him? Who knew? I didn't believe that it had anything to do with Jacobs. This was another family privilege, and was I going to throw the chance away on account of cold feet. Going to run from a man of whom I knew nothing except that he had acted with great circumspection under amazing circumstances.

I laughed at Caution whispering he might well be Jacobs's agent, as his wife had been, and rang for Annette.

Of one thing I was certain, the Baron was a baron. He had been received as an habitué and folks here knew the Almanac de Gotha like a traffic cop.

Noon brought reassurance and a morning head. I determined to hug my rooms till the monster should arrive. If the old grandee was a crook, he would pretty surely have a vulnerable spot around his pocket; traveling with a spender such as William Watson bespoke the indigent or miserly — and if he was not, it seemed the cards were all in my hand. Having made up my mind, the opera-bouffe might cost me heavily in riches

or reputation, I was determined to see it through, and proceeded to copy the score, and mail the same to Howard Griggs, while I waited.

"The brother of Madame, doubtless?" Annette suggested, presenting the Baron's card. "Madame does not resemble him at all except in the good style. Ah, it was unmistakable Monsieur was of the best society. But *certainment — quel stupide!* Monsieur would be *le beau-frère de Madame — n'est ce pas?*"

How stupid I had been not to think of passing for his sister or his sister-in-law — or his daughter. I received him with a grin!

My visitor stood some six foot two, and every inch in sight, from the fairish gray hair combed up to cover an otherwise bald dome to the square ends of his French shoes, was spic and span. Aristocracy stuck out of him in bunches. He was a man of fashion, as disreputable a fellow, possibly, as ever pinched past the committee of a gentleman's club — but a von Rathgartz.

While I was taking him in, I observed sharp glances burned behind his lidded lamps. Not an item of the show last night or now — my automobile, its liveried attendants, my salon, maid, clothes, comforts, escaped the valuation. In spite of his affected indolence, he was busy summing up. I appeared to be a young thing rolling in gold, and indiscreet — receiving strangers alone in my own room — but that's where judgment skidded. Well, I knew Annette would be hovering within call, her ear glued to the keyhole.

My method is to have trouble out and over with. I held no weapon but the blunt truth, and the blunter the better for knocking, so I let fly.

"Baron, you ask for the family privilege of calling; you honor me with an early visit, and yet you are perfectly aware that I don't possess the ghost of a right to use your name. What about it?"

He bowed gravely. "Doubtless Madame has her reasons for the — intrusion. If she wishes to inform me, I shall consider it a mark of confidence, if not —" He shrugged.

Was ever any one so delicately generous? But his drawl continued:

"On a certain point I cannot be mistaken. There sits here by you, positive as death, the last of the von Rathgartz. Honor depended on that fact a dozen years ago. The law searched far and wide. We did not find so much as a natural son of my father."

Mental note: chances of wiggling by as a connection absolutely nil. Whatever front I hereafter present to Monaco will be at his dictation. The man's coolness floored me. I wished he had not talked of "honor" and the "law," and said "positive as death" as though referring to a state of mind. I saw I must preserve the social form alive. The most complimentary course, under the circumstances, would be to tell him my story. In his subtle, polite way he had almost demanded an explanation — a matter of tones, not phrases, for he spoke volumes in a sentence.

De Grasse is some little speaker too; he can serve a few mitigating clauses, without the sauce of detail, and make them a tit-bit to be swallowed by the most fastidious. I dropped my chin and my words came separately, slowly, flute notes, pianissimo in shame, and sweet as honey.

"When young — a child — I married foolishly.

He called himself the Baron von Rathgartz. There are many — very many — impostors in the United States. He was dashing, generous, well mannered — and I had no one to look after me. Six months later I discovered — he left me — but my friends knew nothing. The name alone saved me from — disgrace."

Beauty in distress visibly touched my hearer's heart. His lids drooped lower, tears glistened beneath them. His voice was myrrh.

"Do not apologize, I pray you. My humble name is at your service now and always, lovely lady. It is I who must apologize for not having been in America instead of that worthless dog. And last night — in the Casino — surprise took me unawares. I am humorous, and the temptation, I ask you to consider the temptation to own, for even a few hours, one so perfect, beautiful, elegant — Ah! it was not to be resisted, Madame. Pardon."

I laughed at his rush of words, his profound bow. After all he seemed a kind old thing. He had not come to pester me nor armed with a writ for my arrest. The pendulum swung over. I accepted the blasé roué at the face value of his conversation.

"Referring to your affairs, Madame, I understand. Each has his own trouble. We will not mention it again. *C'est fini.* But that a child, with all this —" motioning airily to include the rooms, "should have no guardian! *Ces Americans!* They are incredible."

How easy his manner, how mannerly his ease! The terrible plight of my maidenhood was wafted into forgetfulness. By a gracious turn of phrase he condoned me and spread my sin on the nation. And I was jubilant, poor simp! I believed he had swallowed

the bait. I felt sure he could not be Jacobs's agent, and my vanity plunged into the trap.

"We are a bit incredible," I boasted. "But not in the sense you mean. I was poor when I married. This is the fruit of honest toil — it's mines and rubber."

"Ah! The Baroness is in rubber?" he beamed approval.

"To the neck. Bought at the start and have been buying all the way along. Honest, I don't even know how much of the stock I'm good for — but she's still mounting."

My guest shook his head. "Dangerous speculation. I see you are a gambler. With so much, why do you not begin to sell? I would advise, Madame. Brokers are none too honest, when it's a lady's loss — and no challenger."

"Pistols for two and coffee for one. Great old system. What a bloody battle the Exchange would be if we lived up to it. Since I haven't a living relative to fight, I guess I'd better unload."

Too late I realized the oily old insinuator's drift. A girl and her money are soon parted — specially if there's nobody round to raise a row about it. But he was counting without de Grasse. I smiled.

All in all the Baron proved a very cheerful caller. He chirped delightfully on almost any topic, steadily preserving the buoyant action of a thoroughbred. More and more concern fell from me. He certainly did not represent the law; he came with no fell intention. He came with no intention whatever, it appeared, but to suggest an expedition for the following morning — of course with my friends. If I wanted

to find out the secret of Schlossgartz, there was nothing to do but accept. He set the hour at eleven and rose to go — and on his going dropped a sentence like a bomb.

"It was divorce I mentioned to Madame Mainardy. You will pardon, but a plausible relationship was necessary. You were surprised — pained — at least not well pleased at the meeting. Divorce is a perfect explanation. Inasmuch as I have wronged this charming lady, I am in the dust. I promise you — I will let them understand my penitence — I only am to blame. They shall see me grovel."

Now what do you think about that!

The colossal gall dumfounded me, and before I recovered from my blank surprise he was gone.

Last night's panic was as child's play to my present anger. He had told Sue Mainardy a devilish lie — had told it with tears. He had queered me in her eyes by the readiness of his own confidence. And then he had called, and been received, and had spent an hour in my private salon — how could I refuse to meet him?

Villain! Thrice damned — but, oh, a genius! Down to the last jot and tittle I would be made to act the offended wife, and receive his humble attentions. But why? Jacobs could not care for such revenge; and short of Jacobs what quarrel had the man with me?

CHAPTER XXIII

Moods were badly mixed from thenceforth, and our game of tag around the table grew to habit, for Henri's sporting blood was up. He stayed to fight von Rathgartz; the lists were all Monaco; and our public soon took sides.

Whatever my tormentor said to Sue worked havoc in her womanly sympathies. Where it had been "Clarissa," it was now "dear — Baroness." An adder's sting! My divorced state she thought ought to have been mentioned between friends. And quaintly, and the wonder is sincerely, held to bring about reunion with my poor, heartbroken, gallant, sorry, fascinating husband would count a worthy work of supererogation.

Matchmaking kept her busy those days, for the kid still haunted Duffy, and our compatriot, who was winning and spending at a terrific rate, so reeked of money it behooved a wily aunt to put her best foot forward. His rampant commercialism suggested an office perched high above the mart of rich Manhattan, as Russians conjure up the steppes; but William Watson was not expansive over his own affairs. The savage in him made no bones of snubbing man, woman or child.

He showed himself coy and disappointed in me. I believe he despised my situation more than I hated it myself. A girl who had had the pluck to kick loose once — to let herself be steadily dragged back into the

toils! The sight disgusted his blatant independence. He avoided me, and his cold-shouldering worked the dickens with my plans. Duffy knew the ins and outs of the Baron's business and it was far easier to pump an unsuspecting American, particularly one who dwelt on castled moats with large enthusiasm, than to trap von Rathgartz into details. Princelings and popularity tripped me at every move — I turned savage also.

My tempers left the Baron anything but disconcerted. He sure admired spirit. He courted me so assiduously I never had a minute to myself except asleep. One afternoon I cajoled Duffy into calling, and over tea cups planned to win my goal. But scarcely five minutes after his arrival, before we got the ice well broken on the how-d'you-dos, the old top pussy-footed up. Heaven only knows how much he tipped Annette!

At first he worked the deep repentance gag, and later made it look as if I was encouraging a declaration. Flowers, flowers all the time! He snowed objections under offering remarks in public. What had become of his poor posies? — if I did not wear them — and smirks and grimaces if I did. By and by, when everybody else was aeons old in wisdom, the full farce dawned upon me. I was being seriously wooed. Bets were being made. Gee! How I hated him! But I was more than ever determined to smoke out the ground-hog.

In self-defence I commenced to propose wild escapades. Desire for the near impossible, never before troubling my sober constitution, suddenly broke out like a rash. I absolutely must do this and that — go here and there — anywhere that age should hesitate to

follow. But age never hesitated — not for single moment; it just naturally mixed and coalesced with my craziest prank. Von Rathgartz set himself to carry through my every whim, thereby placing a halo of martyrdom on his thin gray hair; and getting me in all wrong.

"She's a hard one to follow and the devil to beat!" I heard a man remark to Sue Mainardy. Her answer was the more general and less complimentary view of our case.

"What a dance she must have led the dear old chap."

I danced him right enough. I was getting desperate. I fox-trotted him from morn till dewy eve all up and down the glad Riviera. I dandled him from giddy heights, I raced with him on shingly stretches. I was hoyden, termagant, shrew, proud princess, lofty, stupid, vacant, boring, childish and never made him turn a hair. Only when I took to gaming, played steep and kept on playing though every click of the ivory ball stripped me of thousands did he offer remonstrance. And that was a rummy way to make him wiggle. Danger, fatigue, trouble simply didn't exist for him where I dictated, and the net result of my strenuosity was to land us on strange expeditions alone.

The last of these was a donkey ride away up in the hills above La Turbie. It was a stunning day. The idea seized me at luncheon, and I threw down my gauntlet hoping Duffy would snatch it, for some references to the *Carbothia* had got him going nicely. He did make one convulsive effort, while the Kid gave me the up and down. My heart jumped into my mouth — this looked like business. And then Mrs. Mainardy

his fault. I had brought the expedition on my own head. He was only doing the gentlemanly act in escorting a lady whither she wanted to go. But he needn't be so keen about making me live up to the letter of my idea. Duffy's philosophy jingled in my brain: Those that ought to be saved will be saved — in spite of themselves. Well, I didn't like "in spite of." I was tempted to turn my Nanny head to tail and amble home alone. Second thoughts delayed me. During the past few days I had learned many points in my opponent's character. One was that he never argued. He sacrificed, gallantly, gratuitously, on your altar the thing you suggested doing, and went ahead and carried out his own plans. By this simple means he avoided the appearance of selfishness. But he was selfish, clear through from the hide to the backbone! And he could make himself more offensive in fewer words than any human being I have ever fallen foul of. Now how would my dear old beau comport himself, if peeved? I pondered a full minute and then decided to hike along. It seemed best to stick the trial out and jog trot with him till I got a clue. Then me for action.

Gee! What a place that was on the other side of the first little pass! And wouldn't it have been the set for Duffy's confidence? Little Clarissa is no bum planner — only her plans don't always come off as planned. The country rolled around us wild and lonely as the sea — and so much of it. I had not dreamed such miles and miles of mountains divided Monte Carlo from the provinces. They swelled and billowed northward, monstrous, deserted, giving neither sign nor sound of life. I shivered, eyeing the Baron askance, for once we had gone beyond the sentinel mounds and laid a fold

of the road behind us, I would be as completely shut away from human aid, as if buried in dungeon depths. The path soon merged in grassy wilderness. Tilted grassy slopes surrounded us. An uncouth Gypsy Italian-looking fellow passed, and was lost beyond a hill.

"If that's the kind who travel here, then let's go back!" I cried. "I've read of brigands — and I think I like them best in books."

"Bah! Madame need not fear with me. I carry a revolver always — but for such — why waste a shot?"

Von Rathgartz stretched out his long right arm and it came up like a jointed iron rod. A show of strength which had the reverse effect from its advertised purpose. Madame immediately began to shake in her stirrups.

I was determined not to get farther away from the golf club road than need be, and set myself, without open contradiction, to combat the old beau's purpose. So I called a halt and dismounted, complaining of cramp.

My escort handed me down without demur, and I stood and raved about the mountains, while that subtle smile played under his moustache. Three minutes' spouting emptied the vats of my first enthusiasm. I had used up every polite adjective in the vocabulary — charming, exquisite, enchanting, attractive, delightful. While all the time my nerves tingled to yell the one supreme qualification of the scene — LONELY!

Just because I felt isolation, breathed it — and, above all else, feared it, diplomacy kept me babbling nothings about the heavenly view. I was booked to fill time by sheer lung power, like blowing up an air cush-

ion. I barked trivialities. I swept the horizon with eyes fierce for suggestion. I dropped my glance. I saw growing things — little things — blades of grass, and cried eagerly:

"Are there any flowers here — mountain flowers? I've never picked a posy on a pinnacle. What is it again you call the poets' joy — guaranteed to act like absinthe?"

As I talked, I walked slowly around searching in the coarse grass.

The Baron laughed. "Ah, you will look a long time here and not find edelweiss — it is of the Alps. But we poets do not miss the stars when our sun is shining."

Ignoring his compliment, I continued to move in circles ever backward toward the open road. We made a swell show there among the panoramic hills. I, the complete product of Annette's skill, turned out as I had lunched, and not for donkey riding; holding hard on Nanny's bridle, and stepping lively; and my companion pacing back of me, determined to come even, but sadly handicapped by a self-willed ass. His mount wanted to quit our circus procession and study the flora for himself. Von Rathgartz was obliged to stop and reason with him, and every time they lingered, I scurried on. Finally, they caught me up. He was close beside me, and spoke softly.

"La Baronne has flowers at her belt more beautiful than any ever growing in the mountains. These lilies of the valley — Ah!" The tall old man bent to smell my bouquet, letting one hand fall upon my arm.

The cheek of it! I drew away quickly.

"You are unkind, Madame, such a small liberty."

His omission of apology acted on my mood like a match on a cannon cracker.

"I don't like snakes!" I cried rashly.

Von Rathgartz's expression clouded, his lip curled. "You will more probably meet wolves here," he said, with a sneer.

I regretted my rudeness, and followed in silence as he strode along. After we had gone a little distance, he began to speak with a fine dignity.

"Madame, I have sent you flowers twice a day since the episode of our introduction. I have called on you as often as propriety allowed. I have made a point of being always where you were likely to be — of meeting you with your friends. They, perhaps, do not exactly understand our position. They do not know what lies behind. It is immaterial — to fool them was my pleasantry. But you have known, and you must have understood because I was always everywhere at your service. In America, as in Europe, such a course speaks for itself, does it not?"

I did not answer. I was struck all of a heap by his reference to what lay behind. Was he referring only to his joke, or could he mean the Baroness and Jacobs?

"These circumstances indicate much in your society, *n'est ce pas?*"

"It means you like me —"

"Only so much?"

He waited for an appreciable length of time, walking with his chin sunk on his breast, and eyes downcast. I believe the old Don Juan cared to win me on his merits. My stolid silence piqued him. He shrugged, muttered "Hèlas!" and stopping, so that we stood face to face surrounded by our asses, said coldly:

"I am a widower, Mademoiselle. There is no reason why we should not marry."

The tone, more than his words, confirmed my worst fears, though it needed nothing further than the changed style of address to show he was up to mischief. Unless he wished me to realize that Jacobs's confederate had been his wife — why put it that way? My blood ran cold and hot by turns, my tongue stuck to the roof of my mouth. Never had any spot on earth seemed so vast — so LONELY!

"There is no reason," he repeated, softly now.

"Except that I can't stand you." The very crudeness of my answer heightened my anger. I was a barbarian. I did not know how to be positive without being vulgar. And this adroit personality matching me would steal advantage from every break. He smiled already with perfect good form, overlooking my incivility as one forgives a naughty or excited child. He commenced to remonstrate with me gently.

"Society, in my country, does not consider that a reason. You do not care for me to-day, but in six months hence — eh? The lover is despairing for his lady now, sincerely grieved for her, and yet he will enjoy, three, four, six others before the leaves fall. Personal feeling plays too great a variation to make like and dislike reputable authority. Here we arrange these matters for the mind as well as for the heart. Ah, but doubtless you are expecting a lyrical motif! I know it is so managed in America. *Je t'adore!* There will be a place for that later."

I had no choice but to remain silent, checking my wrath, thanking the powers that I was spared sentimentality. His next move took me by surprise.

"Shall I announce our engagement, then? This will amuse our friends. You could not hate me, quite, since you had not even changed your name. It has been remarked."

The reference to their impudent bets, the neat reminder of my questionable position, and his own hold over me tipped the lid off.

"You will do nothing of the kind!" I cried, beside myself with anger.

"Why not?"

"Because I won't marry you. I wouldn't marry you, if you were the last man on earth! I hate, loathe and despise you! I don't appreciate your sense of humor, nor fancy your pleasantries. This week hasn't been any fun for me. You held me here in a horrible predicament and pestered me with your attentions. Masquerading as your divorced wife was bad enough — but if you think I'm going to be a perfect fool and marry you really — you've got another guess coming."

I stopped for breath, and we remained measuring each other eye to eye. I felt he was strong and determined. What did he know of me except my own story? I must force his hand. If he belonged to Jacobs, he must speak of Jacobs.

"My husband —" I began, for the trouble with a stupid lie is that you have to stick to it.

"Mademoiselle, you are not married." Two pin points of blue steel glittered in his hard face. "Even if I had masticated such a foolish tale, marriage under an assumed name is not legal. I repeat — there is no obstacle."

So he had never accepted Henri's bluff! But how did he know I was single — unless he knew all? At

that minute he wore the grim look of one who takes his foe alive or dead; and suddenly I understood. He was playing for himself and his own fortune first. If I married him, nothing more would be said. Fear of the past overwhelmed me, along with fear of the man. Uncertainty drove me crazy. I stamped my foot.

"Why do you bring me here to hector me? What do you want? If you want money, I can pay —"

He leaned against his donkey, smiling again, and, as his grin broadened, I saw my mistake.

"Why should you pay me?" the Baron asked, coldly insolent. "And why should I accept part, when I can have the disposal of the whole fortune? When a beautiful lady is ready to give money, she can be persuaded to give much beside money — I want everything."

I drew myself to my full height, my eyes flashed; I felt tall and bold as a hawk. I hated him.

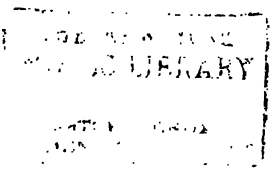
"Want then! Want!" I cried. "You won't get one red cent!"

The beast had the cheek to admire me. "Ach, so you are magnificent! That is the way I like you best! It will be necessary to tease you sometimes. *La figure!* It is superb!"

That touch of patronage roused the American eagle. She flew at him. "Damn you! Damn your hideous tricks! I won't give you anything. Marry you! I wouldn't touch you with a ten-foot pole!"

I lashed desire, and spurned his admiration all in one. The man's face changed. His watery eyes turned red-rimmed, beads of perspiration stood upon his forehead. He was inordinately vain, and I had flicked him on the raw. Perhaps he really fancied a girl like me could love him.

"I wouldn't marry you if you were the last man on earth"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"You won't pay me a red cent, hein! You refuse to give me anything! You will give me a kiss, now, my beauty!"

He swept over me. Long arms circled around, enclosed me, pressed me tight against his hard, flat body. He bent me backward. He covered my face with that hateful moustache. I had never been kissed before. Never! I thought only of his yellow teeth.

During the next fifty seconds — hours — years, my wits bust a record, while I stood quiet and suffered his shameful embrace, alone with him there, far from assistance. What a fool I had been to rouse the sleeping wolf! I could easily have promised — easily have broken the promise. To struggle against him now would only make matters worse. I must wait, I had to endure, I counted madly: one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten; one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten — while his hideous kisses rained on my face. I wasn't so much scared as disgusted. He had offered marriage, he wanted above all things to marry me, and, however upset for the moment, he was too calculative to endanger a possible fortune. At the worst I must accept him. And once delivered out of this, shake the dust of Monte Carlo from my feet forever. Let him follow — let him do his worst — anything was better than being embraced. Bah! I would rather be hung for murder than marry the beast! One, two, three, four, five, six —

"Whe-he-e-e-y-yo-yo-o-ho-ho-hoh!"

Violetta lifted up her voice and brayed.

We shot apart like an explosion, while east and west the glorious noise resounded. My Nanny joined its echoes; and von Rathgartz turned upon the twain to

slay them. Then realizing love was free he grabbed for her — and caught a donkey's tail.

Clarissa left him suddenly amid the music; nor did her scooting shadow waver until La Turbie and the waiting automobile came in sight.

CHAPTER XXIV

Thanks to the donkeys I had not been forced to go through the humiliating pretense of accepting von Rathgartz. But he had kissed me, had held me in his arms, had taken a lover's privilege — and how was I to put the mum plaster on his tongue? To-morrow he would do one of two things — report me to Jacobs, or announce our engagement to the Mainardys, and make a story of his conquest in the smoking room. He could be trusted to do the latter anyway. One had only to picture him, deserted, descending alone, flanked by the two animals, to know how bitterness must animate his memory.

Laughter took some of the disgust out of me, though I realized my plight. And when I had washed his kisses off, I donned a negligée, made fatigue an excuse for getting out of a dinner date; and settled my mind to some long, deliberate cogitation.

This was to be no wild riot of pangs and fears such as I had experienced earlier. Our wits were clear. The woman stuff of the afternoon had not affected Henri as it upset me, and it was de Grasse to the helm.

Blunder by blunder we reviewed the situation and its causes. First, there was the charge of murder hanging fire from that beach affair, negligible in itself, the inquest having laid both deaths to Felix's hand. Of course, if I should be hauled up on other accounts, it was still in line to form an unpleasant addition, but

old Stutz loomed more terrible on my horizon. Terry had been right about the little flivver that went flop into the water — Stutz was struggling back to health in a prison hospital cot, and there was where my fortunes struck a bunker. He honestly believed he had been robbed before the hand of justice fell upon him. However, he had come by that black case, he had certainly handed it over to me in good faith. He would swear through thick and thin that Clarissa took his diamonds, and being one of Jacobs's dupes, Jacobs would naturally be the last to disabuse him on that score. Should he turn King's evidence, like the boatman, the thing looked black.

Jacobs himself was the immediate menace. Griggs and I knew he had planned to send a bona fide messenger to the beach — a girl who would find no automobile and no boat. She must have been sadly at a loss, poor innocent, if she ever got that far. I wondered what she had done. Whatever her course she had lost time, luckily for us, and Jacobs had lost more communicating with Felix — or Felix with Jacobs. Jacobs wouldn't have hurried, knowing that load of diamonds was fake, he'd just as soon have had them disappear, and Felix must have been fine and drunk by then. Eventually, they must have worked round to the pawnshop man — and that's where I got off. He would be able to spot me again among a million.

There remained the Baroness mixup. If she had been working for Jacobs, she had failed to carry out his business. He must get wise. It was dead easy to trace me — what an ostrich I had been to hide myself with a blare of trumpets! That Yiddish letter commenced to haunt me. Jacobs possessed power and

money. It looked as though he had already set his spies at work; and his ability to do me dirt was limitless.

On top of all these fears the Baron's pretensions to my hand raised an immediate issue. I could not remain in Monte Carlo. At any moment he might turn and rend me — blow my reputation to a bomb pit. I must give the man the slip; skidaddle with a big SK; go while the going was good, and go alone. Well I knew he had bribed Annette, and that she would cheerfully fly with me, and telegraph our whereabouts. Henri was always good at a start. A dozen schemes, melodramatic, humorous, impossible, whirled through my head, but none of them wound up just right; none of them carried me beyond Monaco — let alone my trunks. "Trunks! You rave! This time it's to be no spotlight exit," Henri warned me.

Seeing I couldn't take everything, I decided to take nothing; to feign an illness, shake my friends and board the Ventimiglia train at lunch time, when Monte Carlo would have settled to the serious business of its day.

Woman's everlasting gag, the headache, served to lay me out of promenade and luncheon party. I sent Annette around with a cool note of explanation, written so as to curb Sue's sympathy short of a call, and added a shopping list bound to take her two hours, with Paul driving the car. I did have a touch of head, and I wore a fit of the blues that for pure color rivalled an artist's palette.

The girl tucked me up, supplied me with salts and a copy of the Paris *Herald,* and, after repeated offers of service, trotted down the hall happy as a cricket over

her outing. When she was gone, I sprang erect and fired my paper clear across the room. It was maddening to think Annette would never minister to me again. I had been a fool not to quit when the Baron put in an appearance. I had lost every trick without so much as hearing him mention Schlossgartz. In fact, he had so persistently avoided details I began to wonder if he really was a title. I lost myself in morbid fancy. The winged snake came and set upon my eyeballs. It had pestered me outrageously since these strangers crossed my path, the little rubber growing daily in importance. Did that indicate to sell? The Baron had seriously advised me to sell more than once, and the market had gone off a few points during the week. Now it was booming again. Were he and Duffy stock manipulators and laying for me there, too? I pondered Duffy — the habits of the beast at home — and guessed he was a good deal less of a spender in America.

Thinking about my money perked me up. Why should a woman with millions — five, eight, ten — my fortune varied day by day — lie down under anybody's thumb?

"Me for my own name and my own country!" I cried, jumping out of bed.

"I reckon I can put up a pretty spunky fight against prosecution in New York City. And as for folks here — I lived a long time without the Mainardys, and there's as good fish in the sea as ever was caught!"

Compared to our arrival, my preparations for leaving were a fair joke. If I escaped with my dressing case, I would do well. It was a very magnificent affair wonderfully fitted, dozens of bottles and brushes made

it heavy as lead — but not too heavy for Clarissa in an emergency. Remember I was no fine lady pampered from the cradle up. As I hefted the case in one hand, I thought of the boxes of lingerie which I had been expected to swing from the high shelves at Bain & Dingley's down to the counter and up again. The scene of my early victories trumpeted a bugle note. Running away with one's pockets full of honest money is a cinch! Doubts scurried in all directions before a great heart-sized laugh.

My hands fairly twinkled as I stowed in jewels and private papers. There was plenty of time, but Annette might return, and must not find me packing. Suddenly I went up in the air. A time table! My kingdom for a time table! When did the Ventimiglia train go through? Rummage, rummage — but nothing doing! The property man had tricked me. I daren't arrive at the station early and await results; I was too conspicuous. And I daren't face those sunlight streets before the hour when man would be intent upon his midday meal. I was too popular. I would be seen, recognized, accosted, roped in for something.

I fumed, I rummaged, but I dare not ring. None knew better than the Baron how to fathom a bell-boy's knowledge by the weight of a small coin dangling on a string of questions. To have a sheet sent up was to advertise whither I journeyed. I must just go down myself, loiter through the hall, perhaps buy a copy of the papers I already had, and snoop a folder. The earlier the safer for this little curtain raiser — but first to dress.

Gown after gown I took from its place, tried and

discarded, finally picking on a neutral toned suit more in the style of Mrs. Brown than any giddy aristocrat. Plain accessories added themselves without effort, but deciding on a hat ate up my courage. To choose one — only one, and forsake the others. My eyes watered. I tried on all the favorites — the ruby straw, the oyster gray with its soft plumes exactly matching, a black lace and jet — real lace and real jet, several suèdes — perfect dolls — tan and pink and green; and last, the fairy blue — the blue with the soft tulle underrims and the misty white lace veil. I tried this one on over and over. How tragic that it would never again crown my titled head. Could I bring myself to carry a bandbox? No, I could not. My training as a perfect lady, though brief, had been too thorough. So I kissed its dainty edge as I laid it away in snowy tissue paper. I hoped Annette would take it.

Jimminy Crickets! The idea of what was about to become of all my things opened vistas. They'd think I took French leave lacking spondulics. I'd talked about rubber, but never shown my certificates, and I'd been losing heavily in the Casino. The Baroness was busted! Rather than face it, I'd left the proprietor to pay himself out of my effects. If gossip didn't put a spoke in von Rathgartz's wheel, I missed my guess. In twenty-four hours he'd be drinking himself to death over his lucky escape.

Surveying myself critically in the mirror, dressed by my own hands for the first time in months, I realized the Baroness von Rathgartz, that final letter in the art of womanhood, was indeed dead.

"Absolutely safe," I murmured, heart and body

sinking together in the elevator. "Nobody will recognize me this way."

Alas! I had hardly returned to find Annette open-jawed regarding the litter of my toilet than I heard the unmistakable bony-fingered rap-a-tap-tap of the Baron's arrival. He had recognized me! I almost loved the creature out of sheer gratitude! But how to escape him — what to do? My paragon maid would let him in, if he so much as offered her a louis.

One of Henri's inspirations saved the day. Annette being a sort of female edition of de Grasse he understood her wiles.

"I have been looking over some gowns," I said, airily waving away thousands of francs' worth in creations by Paquin, Chèruit, Beer. "The sapphire and the taupe and these trifles on the ottoman are for my right hand. You will look nice in the hat. I feel better, and am going out; maybe I won't be in to dinner — you can have the afternoon off. Whoever that is, say Madame is not at home."

The knocks grew urgent.

"Annette," I added, looking her straight in the eyes. "If that is the Baron von Rathgartz, hold him a little in conversation. I do not wish to meet him going out. Here. Let me see you."

It was farewell. Placing the cherry hat on her dark hair, I tilted her chin. I gazed at her. I kissed her. We were both embarrassed.

But my munificent gift had satisfied her avarice. "Madame is kind — they are so beautiful!" she gasped, white teeth gleaming, and hastened away to do my bidding on an expert specimen of the flirtatious

male. Common jealousy knows no pang like Henri's. Think of the eyes she would make!

I heard his voice, "Mais, Madame has just come up. I saw her take the elevator this minute —"

My maid's reply began with a zip and ended in a dove coo. It got him.

"What have you been contriving in her absence? Trying on the dresses, hein? How does she look, the little one?"

Ah! He would soon know. The door closed. It was diamond cut diamond. I was saved at the price of Annette — but Henri raged! I grabbed my bag from where it stood ready, beat it down the stairs and jumped into a cab.

Ever so little later we were steaming out of Monte Carlo, second class — a girl and a valise — with no concern in the world but where we would book from Ventimiglia.

CHAPTER XXV

Clarissa Kendall ambling the streets of Naples felt small and unimportant, but astonishingly happy. I had written to Griggs at once; my real need being expert advice on European morals, and counsel as to what direction things were likely to take. And he, good scout, cabled back to sit tight till he arrived. Evidently he wasn't wasting sleep over the Baron, so fear didn't weigh me down perceptibly either. The paving stones hadn't scuffed one dainty pair of shoes, before I guessed that Henri's heart was pretty much at home in Italy. Indeed, his persistence in exploring the narrow ways and mangy houses prevented us from being on the dock to welcome Howard.

Big busses full of passengers were already bowling from the wharf as my carrozzella whirled along the water front. With the driver lashing and swearing, plying his tongue as vigorously as his whip, me standing to urge him on, and frightened pedestrians turning from cover to swell the torrent of abuses gathering in our wake, we made a cheering bit of local color. And Griggs, his round face burnt but beaming, jumping out of his carriage as I threw myself from mine, added the last un-English note. We fell upon each other's necks.

"Clarissa, old thing! Jove! I hardly knew you. I think — that is — you're changed. You know what

I mean — I believe you're prettier than ever!" He was holding my two hands, apoplectically red.

I squeezed his. "You're a sight for sore eyes!"

"Hot stuff, this meeting here, eh — what?"

We proceeded to a high balcony overlooking the kingdoms of the earth, and lunched with a tarantella in our ears and questions flying. But first I took the menu from him.

"Not on your life, old boy. I've eaten nothing but *pension* food for full three weeks, twenty-one mortal days, sixty-three nearly fatal meals. This is my treat — you can pay for it, if you like!"

When he had pronounced my selection an extremely sound effort, we unbosomed ourselves freely. My tale was the best, or seemed so then, because its pattern was all worked through in detail and didn't need any aniline dyes of imagination to make it vivid. But I could see Griggs was dying to talk.

In New York they were tearing up certain streets and paving others — the subway was still under construction. That's about all the home news I got out of him, his mind being largely projected into the coming weeks. He was full of a big spiritualistic powwow due to take place — a regular time! Big-wigs planned to hurl themselves from London for the sole purpose of experimenting through a strange and powerful medium; a riot of Science had been organized to make wise this gay, shallow, colorful, aching, poverty-stricken, crime-bespotted, glorious city of Naples. Well, Henri and I can milk as much interest out of a joust with the other world as anybody. But I was disappointed. I'd expected to be breezed about by Howard, and enjoy life, and here he was figuring to

shut himself up in a tomb. All those famous Johnnies would cut me out of his company. I thought it a raw deal and told him so, gently. Thereupon he braced his courage and drew himself together for the plunge.

"Clarissa, I legged it over as soon as I received your message, but I was booked for Europe anyway. Nothing — not even Angelica — could keep me out of Italy just at present. It was my great ambition to persuade you to come on here from Monte Carlo — if you know what I mean — I wanted most awfully to have you and de Grasse on the spot. Sir Herbert Slawson and Sir Gillespie Drake, personal friends of my governor, aren't like — like members of the vulgar crowd, don't you know. Wouldn't you — ah,— I mean — will you consent to meet them?"

"Meet them! Sure. If they stay here and they're friends of yours, I guess I'd have to do some dodging to avoid it."

"Yes, certainly, of course. But I mean talk to them — tell them — take them into confidence. You'll like Sir Herbert. He's by way of being rather a topper."

"Talk to them — about de Grasse? Always the same old song, Griggsy!"

He flushed, opened his mouth, shut it again and sighed.

"Get it off your chest," I said. "I'll listen."

He spoke earnestly. His utterance was positively thick with desire.

"You know, old girl, if you'd only talk it over with the two of them and then do what they say — asleep — or something — tremendous things might happen.

When I think of what might happen and what hasn't got a chance to happen so long as you continue selfishly to keep Henri bottled up inside you — well — I mean — as long as you refuse to give him a free hand — to allow other — other mediums to get at him. I feel it's — it's —"

"Like taking candy from a child? Cheating the future generations, eh?"

"Isn't it rather like cheating something or somebody? Don't you feel you kind of owe a turn to the world — to people? Life's doing pretty well by you, and even if you refuse to admit it, you and de Grasse are of — of thundering importance to Science. Jove! Don't laugh! How am I to talk about the bally thing, if I can't — can't mention it?"

I did laugh, but he brooded, steeped to the chin in serious purpose. I began to consider the suggestion. Tremendous things. H'm, as long as they weren't too upsetting I rather thought I'd like to go the limit.

"Howard," I said at last, "you're much nicer when you philander than when you philosophize — most men are. Philosophy's a bore. Knowledge is a bore. Science is a bore — especially in Naples. You're a bore. Worse — you're the slave of an idea. You make me mad. But I could never stay mad with you. You're a nice thing to have around and, because I'm threatened with the loss of your society, I feel real peeved. You fix it up with the old highbrows to let me in on their séances, and maybe I'll let them in on Henri."

"Clarissa, you're a splendid fellow!" He seized my hand. He gloated.

"There's another matter. I was touching on it

when I spoke about life doing you well — not that I want to — to take liberties with your private affairs — but Swanhill gave me a message for you."

"Yes?"

"He told me rubber looked shaky. He thought it was high time to get out. I promised to mention it to you as soon as possible."

"H'm — he's been cabling since. Thanks, Griggsy. This matter cuts some ice. The boom can't last forever, and I guess it is time to quit. I've got a lot to unload," I informed him, leaning on the table, with shining eyes. Henri couldn't be restrained from bragging. "We've invested every red in rubber. Honest! I wired New York to sell my railroads and a few industrials, and then we simply tossed the dollars over. In those days the price was stepping lively and always in the right direction. Say, we used to sit in an office in London and watch the pile roll up. Take it from your uncle Dudley we've made a pretty penny."

Along the city end of the Villa Nazionale, fronting on the bay, there stands a pile of stone and mortar called a palace. Walls nearly three feet thick rear themselves square about an ample court. A splendid stairway leads from the street level to the topmost skylight without scamping an inch of its breadth. High rooms opening off both sides of the four corridors are lit by narrow windows, and stone, stone, stone, whichever way one turns, makes the place as cold as charity. It sure must have been some dog under an old régime, but its day is over. Now each story rents to a separate tenant, and one, at that time, was placarded largely on the park side: Pension

Frascati. In a back room of this pretentious "boarding house," with a window looking on the court, and only one door, the wise men chose to spread their scientific feast; and during the period of their occupation nobody was allowed to enter it except themselves, the medium, a reporter and Clarissa.

Don't let disbelief make a joke of you by suggesting that electric wires were introduced through three feet of solid stone floor; or that any person contrived to play, on such a stage, tricks clever enough to dazzle those clear thinking, gifted, educated minds. Yet queer things happened within the four square of that compact masonry. They were all written down in shorthand minute by minute, and later published in a bulky book — that he who reads may run. But it was up to Griggs to keep me posted during the performances, for I was only allowed to do a couple of heats in the spook race, as they feared excitement might upset de Grasse.

Griggs had sorted out of his clippings the guarded little paragraph I'd given him permission to write about us; and which, being so guarded, had appeared, said its piece, and faded from publicity without having raised a flutter in the scientific pulse. He showed this to Sir Herbert, who passed it to Sir Gillespie, and by-and-by they slipped it to the crowd. Howard kept on barking about us, as if we'd been a patent medicine. The old boys pricked up their ears, and one or two of them came round to pass the time of day.

You see I'd made good on the Lelland and on rubber, and aside from diamonds, mine was quite a fast record for a perfectly normal young lady whose finishing school had been a counter. They cranked her up on

questions, but in such a polished way my feelings weren't damaged any. Wanted to know who and what my people were. How far I'd been educated, and all that.

Sir Gillespie lost his breath at the start, and the longer I talked, the harder he found it to catch up with facts. They were amazed, nonplussed, and couldn't figure it that a well dressed, beautiful, rich young woman had come unassisted through all I'd planned and got away with.

"Mind you, gentlemen," I finished. "This is every word in strictest confidence. Any one of you could land me in the dock."

They bowed as serious as the woolsack and crossed their hearts. Then a scrawny chap began to hand me problems — square roots of XYZ, and the like. I multiplied the alphabet by the alphabet and brought out a telephone number. He thought it marvellous — for that matter, so did I. He tried to corner me on names of mountains; and how to go from place to place — journeys I'd never made — this-and-the-other-les Bains. Later, I had to play bridge with three of them, and as they were roaring good players, that was the best end of the business. I wanted to have another rubber, but they insisted on sitting round like a council of owls, and continuing to fire questions.

"You say, Miss Kendall, your education stopped abruptly before you had even graduated from the public school?"

"Quite impossible for an untrained mind to do that problem in that way," interpolated the mathematician.

"And you never played any card games till after the mesmeric sleep?"

"You bet I didn't! Granny was dead against cards and dancing and on the farm anybody who cared for himself followed Granny's lead."

"Very strange," mused a little red-haired man wearing bone-rimmed spectacles. "Indicates a vaster field than the theory of subjective self could ever cover."

"Most astonishing case on record!" boomed Sir Herbert.

It's classy to be a case under such specialists. They used to dine all round my table just to get a chance of watching me, till I began to feel like the only automobile in the village. If I sat down in a corner for five minutes, one of them would materialize and try to draw me out. When I shifted, another turned up. I hopped about one morning, as if I'd been a hen on a hot griddle, for the fun of seeing how many I could signal. And, by gum, I got the whole eleven — Griggs, of course, didn't count. Maybe they were put on by him to do the guardianship act, but their motives were carefully wrapped in conversation and sealed with a compliment — the disinterested, almost impersonal flattery which elderly men, of the right sort, spiel to a girl in public.

After this kind of thing had been going on for a week Howard broke the news. The old boys wanted to get up a real cracker-jack of a soul search — perhaps a series — with me featured as the sleeping beauty and their precious medium pulling the puppet strings — an all star cast. Henri was to play puppet. They calculated, as he'd been a dab at hypnotism, she wouldn't have any trouble getting into touch with him. I wasn't awful keen on it myself, because that Italian woman had been doing some creepy stunts.

But I hated to show the white feather, and Howard kept on pressing me, morning, noon and night, to come across.

"Science" and "Opportunity" were the burden of his song, until my temper flew out and I snapped at him.

"Science runs a long way ahead of friendship with you, young man! You're deaf to compunction and blind toward misadventure. Suppose she turns us into spooks? What if I go off in blue vapor? You should worry!"

Jokes and sarcasm were wasted. His second name was serious. The twelve set their jaws to have their own way, and I, like a simp — or a woman, gave in. I said I'd stand for it, and in the saying I kissed my liberty good-by.

Once she had consented to be the party, there was nothing left for little Clarissa but to sit back and contemplate Slawson and Drake making arrangements to give it. This was to be their treat extra and above the meetings listed on the society's curriculum, and the note of competition promised to sharpen interest a whole lot. They went to elaborate pains to set the scene correctly. Not wishing to interrupt the regular business at Frascati, they hired a room in our hotel and laid it out according to rule, black cabinet and all. You see, if you don't play this game according to Hoyle, you don't score any honors, no matter how startling your results. It seemed they wanted to contrive a bodily manifestation of Henri, and then ram it down people's throats as a fact.

Henri was a perfect stranger to the bunch, and, except that Griggs was present, it would have been dead

easy for some charlatan ghost to step in and play his part. Think of a clever little Vesta Tilley from the spiritland skipping over our border, doing a turn in the spotlight, and handing a lemon to all those brainy toffs! Of course, nothing like that could happen with Howard acting as a safety brake. He was the only living soul who could vouch for having seen me and Henri as separate human beings. Besides his identification, I wrote a description of de Grasse, and they stowed it safely away in a strong box, incontrovertible testimony to be opened for comparison after the event. It was a flowery document, believe me! — Henri's idea of himself with elbow jogs by an eye witness.

Griggs and his friends intended doing the thing up in regular style — a manifestation first and a supper following, at which the whole performance could be sized up. It was a rattling good plan, calculated to bring their guests back at the double quick from higher spiritualistic planes to real life, and so provide immediately a sane perspective toward past events. The medium and I were both invited, she to countenance me, but I gathered women were expected to retire early and take their astral bodies with them.

Starting from the hour I said, "Shoot!" Griggs fussed over me like a hen with a lone chick. I wasn't any more myself to him. Clarissa Kendall, the girl — pal in risky exploits, clothed in femininity and wearing corking gowns was dead as a door nail. He erected on her peaceful resting place a monument to Science, and thought I ought to show as little animation as one of those busted torsos in the Louvre. I hardly dared to move or think or eat. I cut out the daily jaunt through Henri's quarters. Howard was

genuinely shocked to find I had been hunting in such holes alone.

"If anything should happen to you!"

"Fiddlesticks! It's safe as a church parade!" I objected. "They're really very decent when I talk to them."

"But you don't speak Italian?"

"They understand my lingo. Oh, for pity's sake!"

He'd drawn a notebook from his pocket, and commenced to write. I sat frowning. When he'd finished his comment and returned his pencil to its proper stall, he regarded me in some concern.

"Clarissa, old thing! You appear distinctly pipped. There's something rummy in your manner which gives me an idea you're not keen on this investigation, don't you know."

"Keen! How can I be keen when you're always croaking at me? 'If anything happened! If anything happened!' I'm the goat that ought to be butting in on trouble. The Lord only knows what's going to happen Wednesday evening — and I want to forget it. Do keep quiet — you'd make a hippopotamus nervous!"

I was shaking in my shoes and I left off trying to hide it. One overt act before the séance showed my mental attitude. I made a will. The notion took me all of a sudden, and I put it up to Sir Gillespie. He pooh-poohed me at first.

"My dear young lady, nothing can possibly happen to you in a simple hypnotic sleep. Why do you imagine, if we thought there was risk — the slightest risk — that we would permit you to expose yourself?"

"Look what happened last time."

He hummed and hawed. "Most unfortunate circumstances — most unusual. I think we can guarantee that murder will not take place among us." His blue eyes twinkled behind round glasses, but seeing me grave as a tomb, he hastened to add: "Of course if it would be any satisfaction to you — a will is an excellent institution. We each like to feel we have left our little legacies into a particular pocket. I shall be delighted to find a solicitor. Plenty of time to-morrow morning. I'll bring the fellow here and he will tie you up in reddest of red tape."

The dear old chap would have sung another tune had he known what strange intention lay behind Clarissa's girlish thanks.

The next day a lean Italian, speaking English like a dictionary with all the biggest words at his tongue's end, and no conception of a sound slang phrase, waited on me in the hotel. I knew exactly what I wanted to say and said it, and he repeated the words with a hair-splitting pronunciation. The writing proved to be an elaborate affair. But when it was finished, and our names signed, and the gist of it bound as tight as a lasso on a wild steer, I went to hunt Sir Gillespie.

"And so you have apportioned your little pile, young lady?" he said, beaming. "Do you feel better and safer?"

"The paper disposes of about two million pounds, sir, so I hope you won't lose it. Not having any relatives the document can't be legally contested. You will find, if you have occasion to read it," he smiled, "I have named you and Sir Herbert and Mr. Griggs as executors; and I trust, when you get the connection, you won't have any objections to acting."

Objections! I guess they wouldn't! I had given instructions to Swanhill, and the Paris and London brokers, to sell my rubber shares, all of them, immediately, at the market. (Gee! Afterwards I almost wished I'd died!). And I had willed the bulk of my fortune to the cause of Science — to be used in research. I was dead scared that Henri, being so much smarter, would take this opportunity to push me out; or maybe we'd get balled up by accident and both practise a skidoo. Anyway, if Clarissa Kendall was left among the spooks, I meant her to have a human chance of getting back again. And I knew the three Englishmen would give me a square deal.

CHAPTER XXVI

I shall never forget the appearance of the séance when I was ushered in. The room was oblong, large and high. A good part of its furniture had been removed to make way for their work, but heavy curtains, close drawn over every window, lent it comfort; and it was lighted like the Great White Way. Afterwards, they switched off the illumination so that rays from one lamp only played upon the medium, but at the time I found those gay electroliers most reassuring. Seats for the guests had been arranged in a semicircle, and the guests were sitting on them. Everything suggested law and order. Beyond the folding doors the supper was preparing and here we waited for an entertainment. In the arch of the bow formed by our earnest friends stood a common little deal table with a vacant chair placed on either side of it, and in front of this again was the cabinet.

"Jumpin' Jupiter!" I cried. "Are you going to put me in there?" And I began to back away. But Sir Herbert explained it was only a shelter for Henri, should he care to manifest himself.

Spirits, being in the know and shy of mankind's tricks, won't consent to parley unless they can have their backs to the wall. In fact they prefer the security of three walls, and invitations are issued to them through a sort of coffin; which is very natural seeing it's their last association with an actual body in a ma-

terial world. All the same the idea took the tuck out of me.

"I fail to get your drift," I answered. "This whole contrivance is for the reappearance of the dead, while Henri is a fine live wire — and don't you folks forget it!"

Of course the heavy-weights smiled at my simple protest, and then we sat as solemn as elders at a cottage prayer meeting. The services of the reporter had been dispensed with out of consideration for me, and I'll bet the bunch were mighty glad of it later on. We waited. The red-haired chap and another got their heads together in an argument and were frowned down by higher authority. Still we waited. The party couldn't begin without the leading lady, and she took her own time.

The medium was a substantial person, decidedly of the lower classes, with a kind face and a good character. Nothing less witchified could have been imagined, except that her eyes held pots of knowledge. When she did come, she got busy right away and that was all I savveyed. It was all Clarissa Kendall knew for seven ghoulish days and eight uneasy nights.

Gee! What a scare I gave them — worse than sharks in Jersey waters or infantile paralysis!

Every man-jack was trembling in his shoes and hanging around the hotel corridor asking, "How is she?" with chalk-white faces and care-crushed mien.

Quite a change from the "happen" motif, wasn't it?

Griggs felt the deepest-dyed villain, seeing he had urged it on me, and was largely responsible for my consenting. He explained the context to me after-

ward, sitting by my bedside and covering my wrist watch with a firm, strong hold, as if he half anticipated I would spark away in flame as they had seen de Grasse go out. For they did see Henri — of all the funny stunts! Can you tie it? Did you ever hear it beaten?

During two full hours that evening the scientists fairly revelled, enjoying the time of their lives. I had gone straight off into a beautiful sleep, for de Grasse knew how to work it from his end too and there wasn't a hitch. But the medium, well aware she ventured on unbroken ground, proceeded cautiously. The séance opened in the lowest grade with table-rapping and a bluish light. The unnatural radiance, which seemed to be the evidence of Henri's spirit, hovered around the cabinet for a while and then decided to peep inside. She spoke to him and he talked back. At first there resounded a mad riot of knocking. She listened to the very end of the clatter and then translated it. He'd been telling her what he did in New York with Lady Deering, and how he had been shot. They asked him if he was wise to who did it? He rapped, "yes," and added, "Rathgartz." But he refused to say why.

"Was it about money?" she asked.

"No."

"Spiritualism?"

"No."

"Love?" suggested a man at the end of the line.

"Love?" repeated the Italian woman. And Henri laughed — quite distinctly — there in the black box. But he didn't answer.

"Crime?" asked Griggs. The rest murmured, say-

ing it wasn't any sort of a position to put a decent spook into, and he changed the form of the question.

"Diamonds?" she repeated.

Suddenly the light went clean out of the box. The winged snake appeared vividly to all of them and floated across the room. They didn't pay it much attention and were regularly cut up over their carelessness when I drew a sketch of the D. T's for them later. But at the time they felt so disappointed over frightening de Grasse away they let it slip.

I stirred in my sleep and moaned a little, Sir Herbert said. He was nearest to me. It must have been a baby moan, because the rest all thought absolute silence had fallen on his flight.

There was nothing to do but begin over again. The medium knew now she was working along with a master and could attempt high A, so she placed herself inside the cabinet and went to sleep. They sat waiting, waiting for the longest while. All saw her plainly — the oval of her face foreshortened as her head drooped, and the white blur of her folded hands sunk in her lap.

The whole twelve men longed so ardently for Henri to show himself, if it hadn't been for the grand smash at the end, I'd have held they projected his image by the concentrated power of their own idea. They say when fellows get side-tracked on these lines, go dippy for the supernatural, they're able to persuade each other black is white and right is wrong. Maybe so, reason does a heap of funny stuff even at its soundest. All I can write about this is the facts as Howard related them.

Hope was lingering in the last throes and some of

the doubters were commencing to fidget, when, bingo! Without a particle of warning that white light glided over the box again and dipped inside it. Attention rose to fever heat. Griggs says he could feel his soul kind of parting asunder as if it was being stretched on a rack, his way of expressing that the pace was strained. Blue is blue and white is white in spiritualism. The glow just witnessed indicated a manifestation.

The curtains thrown open on the face of the cabinet twitched as if somebody was fooling with them, and, finally, gave a wallop, a life-sized yank, and hung down closed together. Through two scallops where the edges didn't quite meet, they could see the light was still inside, but it had grown dimmer. It expanded. Presently it seemed to envelop the box turning it grayish in the gloom. Then complete motionlessness fell over the room. The deadly calm not only surrounded the cabinet, but gathered the watchers into one intense emotion. The sensation was that of being in a void, absolutely detached, floating where there was no air to breathe, nothing to convey sound, no means of reckoning the period involved. Griggs only knew it lasted till the curtains quivered and Henri stood before them.

He was dressed in the same dark nondescript clothes he had worn at the first séance, and his body was strangely shadowy. But his face, the handsome, mocking, evil face with its suavity and its unreliability could easily be distinguished even at a distance.

"Jove!" Howard said under his breath.

The red-haired man asked, "Are you de Grasse?" And Henri bowed.

The movement was unmistakable. He raised his hand and allowed his fingers to rest on the end of his moustache. He did not twist it. The act remained unfinished, suggesting the incompetence of a mechanical doll. Henri was evidently not quite at home with himself.

Remembering their earlier imprudence our bunch dared not question him. They had achieved enough for a first trial by simply getting into touch. So they sat and watched him like a row of mummies in a show case, while he proceeded to glide toward the table.

All this time the medium slept soundly in her sentry box and I slept where she'd left me in a chair at the end of that same table.

Our big-wigs can't agree among themselves as to whether the spirit wearing Henri's personality was really Henri, or a fresh guy who had borrowed his Sunday suit, hands and face and all, and was out for mischief. The burning question up to Science is what they've bagged after they've made the killing. But whichever way you work it, one thing's certain. The garments of humanity these spookies hang about themselves are gathered from the astral body of the sleeping medium. In this affair the spirit may have mixed my aura up with hers, or may have wanted to. He evidenced a skimpy line of goods. None of the twelve wise men could tell the size or pattern of his shoes. He did not walk — the footless do not walk. He just proceeded toward me — a fiend or a friend, crafty, yet with a I-don't-care-a-damn manner that was de Grasse incarnate.

When he reached a spot exactly behind my chair, opposite Sir Herbert, the demon leaped.

Those wooden hands unskilled in detail were not necessary for the finish. A something infinitely stronger seized my throat. His body seemed to cover me like water, transparent, fluid. A dog's snarl ripped the silence; but the struggle, if there was a struggle, took place within my body.

Instanter the men rose to their feet. I wonder partly if the sounds were not emitted from their own dry throats?

Quick as thought Sir Herbert sprang on the assassin. He swears he was at grips with something for a second. They only saw him clutch the air and fall across my knees.

On the instant a terrific racket started in the cabinet. The curtains hung together tightly as if a great hand closed them. Forms writhed behind their folds. The gray shroud melted from the box like yards of chiffon tossed and tumbled altogether, and then the light burst forth — a bright, white, splendid incandescence threefold the power that had entered. It blazed and vanished. A cry, sharp but not loud — the agony of soul surrender — marked its going. The cry had come from me.

Griggs was the first to pull himself together and switch on the current. Except for frightened faces and standing instead of sitting guests the room was as it had been. I lay easily in the chair, my clothing was unruffled, no sign of personal violence showed. Presently the medium came out of sleep and started on the regular reviving stunt. She turned the trick three times — but nothing doing! Clarissa slumbered sweetly. The old guard exchanged glances, and Sir

Herbert commenced to wring his hands, he was terribly upset, poor dear.

When I'd lain locked in the arms of Morpheus, and withstood her ablest efforts for an hour, the medium gave up. She said de Grasse must have quit his lodgings and thrown the key in the river — or words to that effect. Maybe I was suffering from physical collapse and needed a medicine-man, anyway she'd reached her limit. And with that she put on her hat and coat and walked out.

They sent for doctors, and doctors found my heart just beating, my pulse hardly noticeable, and my breath not noticeable at all — except on the edge of a feather. They returned the same verdict —" Collapse."

Griggs, white about the gills, tore up the place like a forty-two centimeter shell. The manager was summoned, a nurse installed, I was carried to my room and put to bed. Ice packs were ordered, hot water bags, electrical appliances, everything that could be done was done — but there I lay.

Hourly day and night a scared inquirer would tiptoe to my closet, and, tapping, whisper eagerly the new refrain: " How is she? " Always answered by three pregnant notes,

" No change, sir."

I was alive but not present — where then? Had I gone callihooting off on the trail of the spirit? And him such a dangerous fellow!

My chaperones rang the changes in every known form of fear, with a few new patterns recently imported to add distinction. Aside from the extreme inconvenience of having me die on their hands, I be-

lieve it would have knotted crape about their very souls had I telegraphed a change of plans and gone away, without so much as treating them to a picture post card of my recent trip. They longed to hang upon my words, and I kept right on saying nothing.

At the end of the third day Griggs wired to Paris for a specialist — a pink of doctors. He came, he saw, he lingered. He felt my pulse, listened to my heart, tested my breathing, lifted my eyelids, did all the local men had done — no more, and charged a thousand pounds for telling them to let me lie and watch me. There was nothing else to do but watch me. And then he also joined the waiting group. I was sure some case! Extreme physical depression following mental shock had been his diagnosis. I might recover and, on the other hand, might die. Probably if I recovered, the carus would save me from insanity.

They held no more séances at Frascati. The Society's meeting officially closed. Its members were all in the same boat and it was no use to squeal, but some of them drummed up excuses for ducking out in a hurry. The Englishmen stood by their guns. Howard grew positively thin, his once-upon-a-time round face lost its perpetual ruddiness, and Sir Herbert and Sir Gillespie added many gray hairs. They took the biggity nerve chap into full confidence and put it up to him whether or not Henri could be lying about loose. He was a Catholic and wouldn't express any opinion beyond crossing himself. It's one of the points that puzzles me yet. Is Henri lying around loose? Did the devil send one of his patrolmen to run him in first time he crossed the border, or was Henri mad at me on some account? Did he wish to

finish me or liberate my spirit? Was it only clumsiness in handling the astral stuff? Had he planned the exit? Was he sick and tired of masquerading as a skirt? I really can't conceive de Grasse wanting to divorce eight million dollars, so I guess the spirits must have snatched him.

Where am I at? I always get mixed thinking about this!

My three friends stood by me loyally and did their turns in watching. It was Griggs, brooding like a statue in a cemetery, I first saw when the lamps lit up. I took him for Madame Buniva come to call me.

"What time is it? Am I late?" I cried, trying to spring out of bed. But the effort ended in a little quiver under the clothes. I couldn't any more have turned myself over than a shark on dry land. You see, capping the nervous prostration, I'd omitted eating for a week. My resistance bulked about as strong as an empty barrel with the hoops off.

Howard sprinted for the specialist, and when he came in all bushy black beard and piercing eyes I began to feel better. He allowed me a cup of warm milk, told them to close the blinds and not on their life to let me talk, and then he beat it for Paris. My healing was scheduled as a long job. After fifteen days of nourishment and nothings I was pronounced fairly well and Griggs risked the telling of their story. To their bitter disappointment I had not a line to add. From the instant sinking into slumber until the natural awakening my mind had ceased to function. Only one thing I could assure them about — de Grasse was no longer a member in the firm of Kendall & Co.

Well, they'd drawn blank and so had I. We de-

cided to bury the hatchet. Still, my own loss was a purely personal matter and I felt it keenly. I couldn't restrain a few tears when Sir Gillespie came to say good-by and handed me my will.

"You didn't need the document after all," he said kindly. "Though we came much nearer to it than I imagined possible — closer than I ever want to come again!"

I opened the paper and let him read the plan for saving myself from a ghost's career. He was amazed and trotted it off to his colleague, to return bubbling and ask for a handsome gift of the paper. It was strong evidence of some premonition theory. They've always got a second iron in the fire, these Johnnies. He joshed me a bit over being afraid. I confessed to having had cold feet.

"And yet you went in for the séance? You are very brave as well as clever."

"I was," I whimpered. "Bu — bu — but I'm afraid you've spoiled me now. I'm just a girl — that served in a shop."

"My dear young lady," he began, wiping his glasses and readjusting them, "this will provides for the distribution of millions. Any girl with a charming, pretty face and — ahem — a fortune, is bound to have a splendid sort of life. You must come to England and meet my daughters — Lady Drake will write to you, care of the Ritz Carlton, New York, isn't it? Between hunts we will talk a great deal about this matter. I am most anxious to know every detail in which you could recognize de Grasse while — while he was alive."

"Bu — but I'm so silly. I feel so stupid. I'll never be worth anything again!" Pride had been horribly cut by my loss, for of course I'd enjoyed being two to everybody else's one — and having such a fuss made over me.

"Can't you tell me what it was that night that made you cry out or moan? Sir Herbert insists upon the moan."

"I didn't feel — if I had, likely I wouldn't tell it straight. You know how an alarm clock striking on your dreams will turn into a gas attack before your eyes are open. No, I guess you don't either. I knew it good and plenty in the old days."

I told him again of the splendid tidal wave of vigor which had swept upon me at the time de Grasse's soul shot into mine. How I had been uplifted, eager to face lions — mentally and physically fit. Evidently, during the hypnotic sleep the virility had been withdrawn. I had grown perfectly accustomed to twice the human share of force and its ebbing left me limp.

"I've lost my pep!" I blubbered. "I'm just a dishrag! Look at me crying like this — Henri never cried. It's womanish! I'll never get over it — I'll never be remarkable again!"

The old boy felt my implied reproach. They were all kind of on the apologetic, as if they'd cheated me. Now for the first time he took up the cudgels in defence.

"Miss Clarissa, I believe you will live to thank us for this accidental separation. It is tremendous to be abnormal, I'll admit that we lesser creatures bow to genius — we are obliged to. It is tremendous — but

it is often grievous. I am rather inclined to think the better part, especially for ladies, is to be normal. Why should a woman not be womanly?"

"But I'll never have any adventures!"

"So far you have missed the greatest adventure of all — you have never been in love. Not during de Grasse's reign? Naturally a dual mind could never be whole-heartedly in love. Each of you must have been oppositely attracted. You to the man and he to the woman."

I lay quite still and let the idea sink in. Charley Ross arose before me. I had loved Ross. I had come jolly near it anyway, with a strong leaning in that direction. But leaning toward was all the sentiment Henri could stomach. There was Swanhill too — and others. All at once I understood why it had been so easy to leave them, and on the other hand my having taken such a shine to Sue Mainardy. I remembered the Terrier and that hour in the boat when I had recognized his double appeal. Being in love with a man must give you a desire to be swallowed whole — well, if you were swallowed — h'm! Maybe Henri hadn't been an unmixed blessing.

Sir Gillespie was enormously pleased with himself for getting me smoothed down. He simmered along in his best fatherly manner, and as he said good-by gave me another nut to crack.

"You must sleep a great deal, and eat a great deal, and make the roses bloom, so that your pretty hats and frocks will be a setting for a splendid jewel. You have been seeking treasure, my dear, and finding it too. Now it is somebody else's turn to find. Only be care-

ful — don't bestow your hand hastily. If you ever want an old man to act a guardian's part, any one to refer any one to, I shall be delighted. Remember you have a vast amount at your disposal. You hold enough in either hand to turn men's heads — and Henri is no longer here to guard it."

He certainly knew how to set one thinking. So there was still a big game for little Clarissa. Making money wasn't perhaps as hard as keeping it. I thought of the Baron and turned cold. Henri had never been good on the woman act — but he had been there. His anti influence served to keep my blood cool. Suppose von Rathgartz, instead of looking like a death's head, had shone with all the beauties of Apollo? I'd been a frost to clerks, but gentlemen are different. They have little ways. I pictured the Baron aged thirty and knew him just the man to wring my fortune from me. As it was, he had advised me to sell rubber. To be sure the stock was weak at the time but it soared afterward. Rubber was a perfectly splendid investment — I'd had a hunch. Von Rathgartz wanted to cheat me, and other people would want to flim-flam me too. I mustn't have faith in any of them. Henri had put me wise about rubber and I determined to follow him. As far as money went, one had to buy some sort of certificates with it. Leaving it in the bank was a mug's game, apparently, and I owned too much for my stocking. If I was obliged to hold stocks, then I might as well hold rubber as anything else. If it went down it would go up later. They all fluctuated. Swanhill had told me so when I first commenced to buy railways through his office. He said to put them in the bank

and forget about them and spend the dividends. Well, I could do that with rubber. I'd just wad away Henri's fortune and live on the profits. And nobody would have a chance to cheat me.

CHAPTER XXVII

Clarissa fancied making up her mind about business was a noble, difficult and all-wise act. But when it came to carrying out the plot, planning seemed to be only a reach-me-down. I was up against the climax before I knew. And I must say Griggs struck me in an unscrupulous hour, when I was out on the veranda for the first time, and every sense steeped in enjoyment. The season was over. Naples grew warmer every day, one could only live to enjoy. Laughter gets into the bones there. Griggs and I supped tea and laughed, and my hungry eyes ate up the people. Never having been ill before, the passing weeks lingered along like years.

Howard sat with his cup perilously balanced on one knee and made plans for the immediate future. He appeared to be quite giddy with pleasure over having me around again, and I fell for the gaff and met him halfway — maybe a little sooner. I'd been lonely, you see, and it was comfortable to have somebody taking care of me and laying out a summer that was to be a fair treat. Two or three weeks at his aunt's place in Devonshire would make me feel as game as a fighting cock; Hellingham situated in the north offered no attraction to invalids, its turn must come later, with Lady Drake's invitation. Sir Gillespie had never been a four-flusher in hospitality, and so, of course, I was booked for a visit at the "Grange." Darling woman,

Lady Constance, topping girls, one son a rotter and the other in the army mostly away from home. Their place, he said, was celebrated for its shooting and I'd have a rattling good time there during the autumn, but between this and that he hoped to show me a real London season.

"Balls and dinners?" I asked.

"Jove, yes!" Several a night if I cared to dine double, receptions and all that hardly counted. What he wanted to do was to take me to the Derby on a drag. Show me a real horse race on the real turf. He promised tickets for the Royal enclosure at Ascot. There would be polo at Hurlingham and the Henley regatta, and all the university sprees I cared for. We must do Lord's too —

"Cricket, don't you know," he explained. "One hasn't seen England, unless one has watched a cricket match. Jolly amusing place, Lord's!"

"Oh, Griggsy!" I cried. "You're the grandest planner! De Grasse can go 'way back and sit down. I've never been anywhere or seen anything. When you told me about Angelica, I thought it was a scream — and now I almost envy her. As a guardian of the young —"

"Easy on!"

I laughed joyously. It was a perfect moment; and right there in the full flight of my enthusiasm, while I was telling him his goodness and his kindness, and calling him an excellent pal, the boy turned traitor. I'm glad to think shame flushed him up a bit, though he always went shrimp pink over tapping the wires on other people's private affairs.

"I hate to bother you about business. It's tolerably

rummy to be serious on a perfectly top hole day like this. But since you've mentioned it — put me in a responsible position, don't you know. I — Clarissa, old thing! You ought to be taking some — some action about your rubber."

"Rubber!" I bristled. So soon, eh, and from this quarter. The source of the blow more than the blow itself threw me out of my reckoning. I knew Griggs never butted in. He must then be very determined, have a particular object in view. And he was so intent on it he failed to grasp my attitude.

"Swanhill has been pestering me with cables. I was obliged to inform him of your illness, and since that he has been wiring me. Jove! The stuff looks weak. He's afraid when you begin to sell — you'll bust the whole bally market."

"Tell him to keep his hair on," I answered sharply. "I'm not thinking of selling — not a single share."

My companion stared. "But isn't it awfully serious? Of course I'm not a jolly specialist on these matters — know jolly little about 'em. Old Dibbs at home looks after all that. Still, if it should go — go down — what would you do?"

Another cup of tea poured in stony silence emphasized my coolness, and, I hoped, a certain amount of annoyance.

"Why do anything? Unless I order them to buy some more."

"It sounds sporting but I — it's not safe, Clarissa. The brokers wouldn't have been sending those messages short of a crisis, I mean to say a panic — a threatened panic. Swanhill —"

"I'm on to him." My grim words cut Howard

short. After he had finished his tea, he began again. Beaty certainly had primed him to talk me over.

"Buying is a splendid idea — only — Jove! Won't it take an astonishing amount of cash?"

"Money! Not more than eight million dollars."

"But you don't possess eight millions in money, dear girl. Buying will take a lot of gold. How much have you in the bank? Oh, I say! I didn't mean that!"

His face turned scarlet, and my anger long repressed flashed out. Not so much against him as against the rotten combination they had dragged him into.

"Howard Griggs, I think it's extremely nasty of you to — to try to do me this way — when I'm sick — not myself that is."

"Trying to do you! Dash it! I'm only making an effort to explain the situation. You can't afford to chuck away the right stuff any more than others."

"I don't want your old explanation! I know it runs like a brook. It's arranged to run — to wash metal — to wash it out of my pocket and into Beaty's. He tells me to sell. You tell me to sell. That wicked Baron chap in Monte Carlo told me to sell long before the stock quit climbing. But I know why all of you are so anxious to get me out. Rubber is an A-1 investment. Everybody wants to crowd in, and when I own so much of all the rubber in the world, naturally they have to elbow me away from the trough before they can stand in my place."

Griggs sat a while silent gazing down on Naples. He was mad clear through and didn't trust himself to speak until the mad looked passed, then his voice was very quiet.

"You are not yourself, Clarissa, so I'll forgive your

lack of confidence. Only allow me to say one thing. Rubber is no investment, even an outsider can see that. The boom is a bally big gamble from start to finish, and, if the brokers have been gassing you about investment, it's a crime."

"No use to talk!" I cried excitedly. "With automobiles and new inventions using it up like wildfire rubber's a necessity of life and necessities are good investment. I've got my feet on the swellest plantations and I'm going to stay put — wild horses won't drag me off. If the stock goes down, it will rise again — just you watch. Beaty told me so himself. He said putting first class propositions down artificially and making the little fellows skidoo so the big guns could hog it all themselves was the Wall Street game. They call it fair — the only way with brokers is to be too cute for them — I'm not surprised over their trying to cheat me, but I am amazed that you should be mixed up in it, Howard."

"Sorry you take it that way," he replied stiffly. "I sold all my stock before leaving New York, so my advice is at least disinterested. What you say is true. There's manipulation, and bucket shops, and a host of other pitfalls connected with the business, but on the other hand, don't you know, there are some decent brokers. I introduced Swanhill to you, and though he is a bit of a rounder, I believe he's honest — looking out for his client's interest and all that. He didn't own a share of rubber when I left."

"All cleaned up at the top and ready to buy in at the bottom, eh?" I sneered.

Griggs refused to discuss the matter further. He was terribly hurt and angry over being called a crook.

Englishmen don't understand how one can be too keen financially, and quite respectable along other lines. We chatted a while about indifferent things, but neither of us was having any fun, so I allowed I was tired and left him alone to be ashamed of himself.

Isn't it the limit how huffy a man gets if a woman don't open her mouth and swallow his opinions whole? Howard stuck to it I ought to sell. His obstinacy seemed to me, then, a part of the big plot, and I kept my back up. He fetched and carried for me till I was on my legs, but our twosums weren't the same lark. Misunderstanding hung between us like a wall. We failed to get each other's jokes. We aggravated each his own nationality with its peculiarities. I began to feel I bored him. Trifles got on his nerves. I'd see him shy away from a slang phrase as if it was a fast one; and that got my Angora. So when I was well enough to leave Italy, I broke it to him straight that I was going back to America. His aunty had come down with her invitation all right, and I dare say Howard would have carried our program through; but I wasn't going to be under compliment to him — not after the mean way he'd acted. Anyhow I guess there's nothing better in London than we can put up in little old New York.

CHAPTER XXVIII

Granny used to say, "A man's as big as he can build." But then she'd never seen a skyscraper, or else my difficulty lay in not being able to handle Henri's pile. Without de Grasse I wasn't up to the gilt-edged social stunt. As we steamed into New York harbor, which I'd never seen from a ship before, owing to the exclusiveness of my last voyage, I knew I was shrinking to about the size of a peanut. Instead of thrills and throbs and all the advertised emotions, I just naturally felt I was a shop girl, perhaps worth a little more than nine fifty per., but no better able to hold down Miss Stacy's job than to be President of the United States.

Of course I'd been to places and seen things with my own eyes. No amount of soul shifting could deprive me of experience; and I'd learned from Henri the tip is to give the world a left-hander, and you'll almost get a black eye from the return rush — but for the life of me I couldn't bring it off. Every time I opened my mouth I was afraid of putting my foot into it. I commenced to weigh the idea of going to college and getting more educated so that I could curb my talk, or the chances of butting into the four hundred by doing charity work. Henri always despised the climber squad, but I couldn't think of anything original to do.

I streamed into the Ritz at lunch hour, and immediately after called Swanhill, intending to pass him an invitation to dinner and then have our quarrel out.

The minute they took my name on the wire I twigged things sounded strained. And by-and-by, when Beaty condescended to speak, I got it in the neck. I was busted. Dead down and out! Rubber had kept right on tobogganing in spite of my blockade. The amount I could put up for fresh margins and carry the load wasn't a straw to the Galveston flood.

"You've been holding a tea cup under Niagara," Beaty explained with the fish; and conversed at length on the subject of water.

"I'm the goat," I agreed ruefully. "One lesson like this ought to be enough."

From the broker's manner I could see he thought it one too many. Of course I'd turned him down on sentiment earlier, so I'd no legitimate kick coming regarding the icy mitt, and it was decent of him to pay the dinner check, still it hurt to shake hands and know all was over between me and the aristocracy. Unless Clarissa Kendall, by her lone, could strike another Lelland there wouldn't be any invitations for week-ends on the Jersey coast.

I shut myself solo into my room and waded through stock reports, balance sheets and bank books, till the bare bones of my horrible predicament hadn't a rag left for covering. I owed money to Swanhill, and there was Tom's salary to pay up, my pride insisted on that, and a hotel bill mounting hourly. While my assets — But why pile on the agony? The wrong side of the market stuff is being handed out pretty regularly. Occasionally it sends a man to the gutter, but mostly it

makes him look sharp and join in the job-hunting marathon, as it did me.

A new refrain commenced to sing in my ears: "If I don't find it before the end of the month?" "If I don't get something by next week?"

What kind of a job did I want? Well — not behind a counter. Knowing more of proportion now I figured the peachy time Annette put in compared to a saleslady, and determined, if the worst came to the worst, to go into service. I chased "situations vacant" like a terrier after a rat, up and down elevators, through windy passages, in underground and "L" trains; waiting with my ear cocked at the door of private offices, and my eye on the hole. I got engagements, but they always petered out. Either I wasn't paid, or the boss proved cheeky, or the firm went to the wall. One morning I tried an employment agency to rent myself as a maid. Shades of Annette! The lady with the corn-colored transformer and the cosmetic complexion who ran the place said it wasn't a bit of good without references, and sure none of the dames I interviewed cared to risk a stranger next her diamonds. Finally, when Erma Swanhill appeared at the desk I faded out of the back door. If she had been looking for a maid, she would have been just mean enough to engage me!

One late afternoon, in a desperate mood, I climbed the inside stairs from the subway to the Times Building. I had determined to advertise and was endeavoring to think up an attractive description of my abilities, and I was so intent on the fancy sketch I failed to notice the sleight of hand lad loafing at the head of the steps.

"Stop thief!"

A dozen arms shot out as the ragamuffin scooted for the entrance; but he dissolved among them like a blob of mercury, wriggled away, dashed across the tiles, and jumped into the revolving door at Forty-second Street, before the crowd had well awakened. A man just going out sprang after him into the next compartment. A dark day had settled into torrents of rain, the doorway was jammed by folks waiting for cars, and the pickpocket found himself unexpectedly trapped. Seeing escape shut off to the south, the kid spun round and endeavored to cut back the way he got in. A bunch of us were waiting for him there too, and he had no choice but to travel. He speeded up, the man kept on pursuing, while the glass door purred. They flew around like squirrels in a cage. People arriving from above and below began to horn in on the circus; the crowd beyond got wise to what was happening and commenced to laugh — everybody laughed. Laughing put us all in such good humor public opinion eased up on the boy. Obviously being the lighter he couldn't hold out long. The pace slowed, and the young gamin, wild-eyed but game, made a desperate leap — and landed clean in the arms of a reporter. A second later the man, grinning broadly, popped from the door and glammed him.

"Here's the bag!" said he, holding it aloft. "None the worse for a trip to Coney Island! Does anybody want to have the kid arrested?"

"Not on your life!" I cried, pushing forward. "But it's a darned good thing you froze on to that purse, Terrance O'Shaughnessy, because my last red cent is in it and I'm hungry!" I underestimated the effect of that speech. A couple of philanthropists

moved forward, and I hung my head, half-laughing and half-crying.

Terry peeped under my hat brim exclaiming, "Clarissa!" in accents of joy.

I felt so happy I wasn't able to speak for a minute, and let him tuck my hand under his arm, saying: "Let's get out of this. Can I call your car?"

"No, you can't — I don't own a car! I don't own anything any more — not even a pair of rubbers. Take me over to Childs' and I'll tell you a Cinderella story backwards."

Having found him, he looked too good to lose, and I knew the surest way to hold the Terrier was to unload Romance. So over a marble-topped table and a fry of ham and eggs I spun the yarn, starting in Bain & Dingley's and ending up to date. Part of it I'd told him floating on Lake Erie, and much of it he acted in, but ranging scene on scene in order made it a brand new play — a thriller too. Not once did he show doubt or scorn or superiority, but just sat watching my face and remarking, "Umph!" at times, to indicate he was on.

"You've never known the real Clarissa, and maybe you won't care for her," I finished; then, struck by an idea, opened my bag and spilt the Baroness's little key out on the table. "Here's my credential that every word is true, this and Ross's nugget are the only talismans I keep. Now tell me all you've been up to yourself."

As the dinner throng thinned the air grew clearer, our hearts were uplifted, and it's difficult to beat white tiles and nickel-plate for striking a cheerful contrast to rain and wind. We ordered fresh cups of coffee, and

sat on talking. The Terrier's blue eyes beaming opposite made me feel as safe as an insurance policy.

"What have you done with your black boat?" he asked presently.

"Haven't done a tap with her. The *Swallow* is stowed away where Tom bunked her last fall. I ought to have tried to sell her — but I didn't know how."

"Good work! I hoped you hadn't chopped her up for kindling wood, or parted with her under the hammer, which I believe is about the same thing. I've got a plan. I'm going down to put the lady in the water, and maybe you'd like to take me boating next Sunday?"

"Lucky the ocean is nobody's swimming pool," he replied to my enthusiasm. "But that's not all — there's method in my madness. Things look very much as if Bully's luck and mine had changed. We've gone into this new moving picture business."

I burst out laughing. "Terry, Terry! I'd never have thought it of you! Are you playing hero and Bully the heavy lead?"

He puffed his cigarette, holding my glance with an indignant eye. "Bully is the crack camera man of America. And I'm owning actors these days. Another chap and I got together on a film company — making the pictures, you know. It looked pretty good to us six months back and it sizes up better now. We're thinking of building a big studio somewheres over in Jersey."

"Glad you've made the grade!" I cried, reaching for his hand and trying to keep a shade of wistfulness out of my voice.

"Listen, woman! We're running a story now with

a boat in it, and that's where you turn some easy money. Our company will pay you rent for the *Swallow,* and if you want to steer her yourself we'll pay for your time too. By the Lord Harry!" He brought his fist down making the cups dance and jingle. "What a dub I am not to have thought of it at once — and you looking for a job! There's heaps of things to be done beside motor boating. You can dance and swim and ride and golf and wear clothes — wear them with a sting. Will you sign on with us, Clarissa?"

"Are you offering me work?" I quavered.

"Work, sure, and play. I'm going to star you in an A-1 comedy we've just bought — a society plot. Have you any clothes left by chance?"

"Clothes! I haven't anything but clothes! Trunks and trunks full of them in storage. I spent weeks in Naples ordering a wardrobe and I did it good — the very latest Paris styles and gee gaws to match. Oh, this is a blissful day, Terry!"

"Top hole! You'll be the rage inside three months. There's a stack of money in the movies, girl. Why, we aren't started yet. Wait! By ten years' time the swell actors will be crawling to us on their hands and knees. We're going to cut the planks clean out from under the feet of the legitimates!"

"And you're taking me in on the ground floor. You are white! You know it was Henri worked the Lelland," I added apologetically.

His twinkling eyes showered me all over with little blue sparks, and I knew from his smile he didn't give a hoot for the de Grasse story; but all he ever said to show his unbelief was:

"Honest, old girl, I don't find you a bit changed."

CHAPTER XXIX

October found me broken into harness; Judson had already raised my pay; and you couldn't have told the Cobalt contingent I wasn't Queen of the Movies — not without taking chances. Our company was in shape to build too, and the Terrier and I drove pretty near all over Jersey, in his secondhand Ford, looking for a site. After a Panhard it was some joke to be travelling in a box on wheels with a sewing machine doing the energy act, but we had lots of fun out of it, and, on our final trip, a cussed run of luck, so that by nine-thirty we were still coming along east, trying to pick up Newark and a beefsteak. It was pitchy dark, not a hint of a moon or any light but our own lamps, and we'd fallen foul of a pavement molded on waffle irons.

"Sleepy?" asked the Terrier, battling with her flivver steering gear. "Don't spoil your appetite by dozing; this lane isn't much to brag of, but it looks like business and we may eat dinner before breakfast yet."

With that a bright red eye winked in front, then another and another, and we nosed up on a barrier where an arrow with the well-remembered legend directed us to "Detour." From the map of the country we had been exploring this bore the ear-marks of some little side-step. We turned sharp and ran into a single-track thoroughfare leading through dense trees, which presently emerged from the bush as a mere rut across ploughed fields. Only a nip of frost in the air made

going possible. A dense black curtain of darkness shrouded the sky except to the southwest, and what I saw there petrified my gaze.

"Thunder and blazes! Am I mad?" I cried, shaking myself awake to stare. "Look, for the love of Mike, and tell me what you see!"

"Strange constellation," said Terry, and "Take care! This isn't midocean," as I grabbed his arm.

"I'm not dippy, then — not stark staring? You see it too? What in the Sam Hill can de Grasse's winged snake be doing in the heavens on the open side of nowhere? Why I haven't had the thing in mind, not a murmur of him, since the final act in Naples!"

"Search me!" I thought I heard the Terrier chuckle, and fell silent.

We continued to draw up on the creature, who stood clear in his gaudy reds and greens, as live a monster as ever wiggled tail or winked an evil eye. My amazement grew.

"Is it a signal? It's not an hallucination? Are you positive you see it, Terry?"

"Can't see anything else! Somebody's spreading himself. Maybe it's Jacobs's racing stables."

"Jews don't race, you old Briton! Honest, what do you think it means?"

"Cross my heart it's nothing more than an electric sign. A firm manufacturing galoshes uses a trademark on that order —"

"Rubbers!" I cried.

Terry looked at me, and I looked at him, and we both commenced to laugh. We laughed so hard we nearly fell out of the Ford.

"If it's a case of mental telepathy," I gasped,

"I'll have to wire Sir Gillespie. I do wonder where they acquired the scorpion — let's go and ask."

"I suspect her of needing a drop of gas, so I'm with you," my companion assented, and "Cast your eye on that road," he added, as we crossed a strip of smooth macadam. "It looks as if we'd been on the wrong level all the way down."

But I was too busy over the idea and memory of Henri's gang to pay him much attention. On we spun, nearer and nearer, darkness enveloping us, with only the winged snake glaring ahead. Then suddenly the crack of a revolver split the night. At least I thought it was a shot and jumped a mile, but it turned out to be a busted tire.

When the Terrier had let up on his own line of conversation, I pointed to the bulky formless mass of a factory looming in blackness, and he admitted the scrape might have been worse. We ran on the rim to the gates, and crossing their paved court knocked loud enough to raise the dead. Evidently the watchman Terry expected to raise was on the job, for lights sprang up within and without immediately, and almost as soon the heavy door opened. There in front of me, beneath the sign of Henri's winged snake, stood Watson Duffy.

He recognized me on the spot and was as cool and impudent as ever.

"Baroness! Ha, ha! This is a joke — a pleasure too — but so unexpected! I told the folks in Monte Carlo we'd run across each other, and we do. You see, I'm never wrong. The third's the charm, too. Come right in. Hospitality's my second name."

Talking all the time he ushered us into a private

office at the rear, where another person sat at a desk poring over papers. Our entrance caused him to turn and spring up. But I was getting so accustomed to surprises by that time the Baron's bow hardly feazed me at all, except that my eyes fell before his — in embarrassment, not fear — I remembered his kiss!

My glance, fleeing from his ironical regard swept the littered table, and then, indeed, it was all I could do to cover symptoms of a leaping heart; for at one side, neglected, unopened, evidently out of the count, stood a little gray despatch box.

My head swam, every instinct toward adventure left in my purely feminine soul, rose to attention. Vaguely I heard Duffy saying, "Shake hands with Baron von Rathgartz," Terry explaining our situation, asking for gas, and the old Austrian, in his most courteous manner, offering to hold a light.

The men departed and I came out of it to realize Duffy was offering me a chair.

"For goodness' sake where are we?" I cried, relaxing my trembling knees.

"You're in the headquarters of the Cat's Eye Rubber Company, that's me, makers of the best wearing and best fitted rubbers in the world. Mark you, I say it and I'm never wrong," he replied expansively.

"Rubbers!" I gasped.

"Rubbers — rubber — the real commodity." He grinned from ear to ear reiterating it, and I understood they knew all about my big financial blunder.

Struck once more by the cruelty of those even white teeth, and agog with curiosity over where he got his information, and what it had to do with Henri, I fired a string of questions at the man.

"Why in thunder do you have that beastly serpent up above your roof? Where did you find him? Is he your own invention or only borrowed? Have you read his family history and his pedigree?"

"Serpent? What are you talking about? Our trade mark?" He threw over a couple of neat advertisements both emblazoned with a drawing of Henri's snake, wrongly accented, and ran on about rubbers for a time, telling me how he made them, how he had scraped the capital together, and cribbed the design from a sketch on a dining-car tablecloth.

"Never miss a chance, you know. I saw this was a snappy fellow and ate him up. Improved him too, don't you think? He's better for commercial purposes anyway."

He punctuated his talk freely with capital I's, and blatant assurances of his own infallibility, and I let him ramble on while my mind leaped from jag to jag of past experience. When the whole world went wild about rubber, I had attributed the influence to Jacobs — never to an outsider. But the thing was understandable. Duffy was the sort to concentrate his entire powers on a new line, whatever his motive, his mind worked over time — a dynamo of power — as he'd said himself. On the gigantic interwoven wireless linking public opinion, his virility had flashed a set of private signals to my supersensitive condition. My enormous fortune had not represented de Grasse, after all, but William Watson Duffy. I glanced about — no mahogany and silver fittings here, just serviceable light oak. Everything in the office shouted newness and efficiency. So this was Sue Mainardy's millionaire

at home. Whew! He must have risked the whole of his precious rubber making at a single turn! I smiled. In southern Europe he and I had been a pair of busted flushes, and Sue had taken us on.

He saw the smile, caught my drift, and cut his recitation short.

"What's the Baron doing here?" I asked.

"Same old story. Down and out — wife died and he lost his allowance or something — so I brought him along. He's selling champagne and making good." A gleam of kindly humor lit Duffy's eye as he waved his hand over the table.

"Fixing up his accounts to see if he can afford Monte next season — can you beat it? I felt he'd succeed and I'm never wrong."

Conversation lagged. My mind was all on the gray box. Presently he vouched: "We've seen you before. Seen you in the *Swallow* — off Deal Beach."

"Ah! — But the past is past."

Curiosity as to the source of his knowledge being satisfied in this one illuminating sentence, my fingers itched to touch the mystery. But the chances of committing burglary in a brilliantly lighted office, with a blatant host entertaining me, and another about to reappear, seemed nil, till I heard the Baron's voice approaching in the corridor.

"That infernal watchman has locked up the stores! Can't you come and let us have some gasoline?"

Terry said untruthfully, it didn't matter, we'd get along without.

"No you won't get on without — not at all," rejoined von Rathgartz in the irritability of age, his cour-

tesy outraged by the idea of allowing anybody to go without anything — particularly if somebody else paid for it.

I listened not to Duffy's apologies. But, insisting on the importance of gas, my thin shoes, the lateness of the hour, and every excuse to emphasize our need, I hurried them all off together. Then with trembling eager hands I sought my talisman. The little key went home, turned like a charm, and a second later nothing but the reading of a printed page lay between me and the Baroness's secret.

CHAPTER XXX

The printed page however shed no light on Jacobs or his precious doings, neither did several sheets of manuscript lying underneath. I found nothing important, for my ends nothing at all, till I opened the last package; and then the facts so stunned me I remained standing stupidly before the criminal evidences of my search.

My mind looped the loop around our entire adventure; it touched upon the relations I had borne to every character. At once I understood our craven yearning toward that old woman in the secret den; I knew why I had risked my neck to lug her to the open decks. I was informed and nauseated. I lost count of place and time, mentally engulfed in a hideous nightmare. I was so shocked I was dead to events, but had I realized the return of my hosts I don't believe I'd have given a hoot. I just stood staring into the open empty box till the Baron's voice recalled me.

"Ah, Mademoiselle has an interest in my poor affairs."

He was on the threshold, courteous and ironical as ever, twirling his long moustache over an ambiguous smile, and watching. The glint in his gray eyes gave the lie to his nonchalance. As the others came up he added, "It is a small liberty for one who was the Baroness von Rathgartz."

I saw Terry stiffen, resenting the twist he gave to that title, but the name itself stung me. Knowing now the horror of the thing I'd seen, I sprang awake and spurned it.

"Don't! Don't ever dare to call me Baroness! That woman — that terrible creature! Her crime is unbelievable!"

"Madame!" In a word he asserted the stern dignity always underlying his ease. "I forbid you. Kindly remember the lady whom you impersonated was my wife."

"If she was a thousand times your wife, it doesn't alter my opinion. I loathe the very thought of her. I wish I'd let her drown like a rat in a hole!"

He raised his hand imploringly. A smile, yes, positively, a smile played across his features; and his voice flowed smoothly as an oily river.

"My dear young lady, you evidently do not read Italian. You defame a woman whose little shoes you are not suitable to unfasten."

I gasped. The men in the doorway listened, open-mouthed, strangers to our conversation. The old chap lowered his finger-tips till they touched his lips and blew a kiss. "My wife," he said again, eyes and voice expressing the transports of a lover.

"Ah! She was a wonder, that woman — a marvel! I alone know — but I do know. I who enjoyed her youth. Ach! We are great fools!" He bowed his head.

"Those that ought to be saved will be saved," Duffy's voice boomed. "What in the name of all that's questionable are you doing with the Baron's box?"

Somehow the old man's attitude made my action look

very cheap. "You'll admit I had the right of entrance," I cried, defensively, holding up the key.

With a sharp intake of breath, sign of the most sincere emotion I had ever seen on him, the Baron questioned: "Then you did know her?"

"I was with her when she died — at least, I was the last — the nearest. I was on the *Carbothia.*" Giving him time to recover, I ploughed along. "She thrust this on me and a message — a mixed-up message — papers, a box, a secret — to hunt — to destroy. I suppose she meant me to destroy the evidence. But, my God! It is too horrible! — I ought to have consulted you."

He had regained his composure, and his attitude to me had strangely changed. My connection with his dead wife hallowed me. "If Mademoiselle will sit," he said deferentially, "I can tell her much which will be perhaps interesting." So we sat one on each side of the table with my theft between us, while the men drew near to listen. Terry had relaxed, seeing the new set of the wind, but the whole delicate affair was lost on Duffy's thick skin. Curiosity alone kept him from butting in.

"Mathilda would not have wished you to consult me," he began. "It will surprise you to know I have not been in Schlossgartz for twenty years. There was no evidence against her. She did what she did by Royal command, but she was human and she regretted. She wanted the papers to reassure herself. It was pitiful. So ambitious, so unforgiving — yet the heart triumphed in the end. In extremity she did not think of the diamonds, hidden somewhere and drowned — a Government loss. It does not matter. She was bound

to have hidden them and make a mystery of them. Mystery grew on her. She had a peculiar mind and a very unforgiving nature. She never forgave me, no, never, and to the day of her natural death she never would have forgiven me, for that little affair with Louise — that first affair, almost immediately after we were married. Ah! It was unfortunate that she found it out."

Deep regret breathed in the words, but no least sense of culpability. He waited a moment before continuing:

"We have in Vienna, as you are aware, Mademoiselle, a Government Bureau for the accumulation of international news —"

"The Secret Service."

"Since you wish to name it, yes. My wife was a considerable person in the Bureau."

"A spy, too!"

Terry shook his head at me, but the old gentleman took no notice of my indiscretion.

"In those days she was young, and beautiful and clever. Himmel! What a marvel! Her control, her readiness, her invention! I was young, too. I was in the diplomatic service. We had a career before us. I worshipped her. I would have kissed the ground she trod on; and she, believe me, Mademoiselle, she adored me. And then that trifling episode with Louise — and all was changed. We worked together for a while longer, but there was no confidence, it was not the same. Proud, proud! She never spoke to me except on business, or for courtesy's sake, when we appeared in public. All the affection once bestowed on me she transferred to our son. She became the creature of two pas-

sions — her work and her son. That is the sort of interest they like in the Bureau. Outwardly we had the world at our feet. But it is not in the nature of things to run smoothly for the owners of Schlossgartz. Very soon her two great purposes commenced to interfere with each other. The boy turned into a human ferret. He was clever, he was full of questions. She could no longer have him about her business. The future balanced on a sacrifice. She must choose her son or her career. It was difficult, Mademoiselle, because her strong illuminating, dominating spirit lived for these two interests only; but in sacrificing her work she sacrificed me also, and doubtless that counted. You see, she never forgave.

"I was no longer the husband of an esteemed and valuable agent, and it was, therefore, no longer necessary to keep me in prominent positions in the diplomatic circle. My wife retired to her castle and made me a generous allowance — I drifted into the eternal round from Switzerland to the Riviera, Paris, Norway, Tyrol. All the time the boy was growing up she kept him from me, and as soon as he was a man and free, he left her. There is a rough justice in things. It was then she commenced to eat her heart out; and finally sought to return to her service. She had put herself badly out of favor at court by deserting, but she was too useful still to be neglected. She started in after twenty years to make good her career. Ach, she was a wonderful woman, Mathilda! Wonderful in all ways. I had her youth, and I shall never forget it. But it was a pity she was so unforgiving. That little affair with Louise — the petite diable — and my wife so affectionate, so tender, so true —"

"Bah!" I cried. "Don't cant to me! — Affectionate, tender, true — a woman who shot her own son!"

Terry sprang to his feet; but the Baron only blinked and stared as though I had knocked his sentiment breathless.

"She didn't," he replied presently.

I swept the papers with a wide gesture. "These say she did."

"No." He was smiling amiably.

"They all go to prove it. She certainly shot Henri de Grasse, and these documents prove he was her son. Why here is her will —" I lifted the page. "You can't prove she didn't do it, unless you prove Henri de Grasse von Rathgartz never existed."

I heard the Terrier chuckle. "Maybe he never did. Maybe I've been hypnotized ever since," I thought wildly. The air was numb with expectation of the Austrian's next sentence. He spoke, suavely, enjoying my discomfiture:

"That, Mademoiselle, is exactly what I am able to prove — he never existed." After fumbling through the papers he handed me an Italian sheet which I had not been able to read. "See, here is the nurse's confession. A baby was born and not baptised, and another baby was substituted. It was this my wife wanted to reassure her — it was on this account she shot him. After a quarrel more violent than the rest regarding the young man's living out of Schlossgartz, he went down into Italy, obtained this confession witnessed by the priests, and sent it to my Mathilda. Damned puppy!

"Her love turned to violent hatred. She had given up her whole life, her career — she had been imposed

upon by an impostor. The fires that had fed two splendid passions rekindled with one mighty purpose. She determined to avenge herself. From then there was open war between them. Henri had worked his way up in the Service; but he commenced to abuse their secrets. The nurse had been his accomplice and had taught him her black arts. He connected himself with Lady Deering in order to establish a reason for coming to America. But he was not so clever as my wife — not clever enough to outwit her. Disguised as his principal she made occasions to watch him. As a grande dame she insinuated herself into Jacobs's confidence."

"Does Jacobs belong to the Bureau?" I asked.

"Not exactly. But Samuel Jacobs is a tremendously wealthy and influential man; in case of this country ever taking issue with my country, his would be the influence we preferred to secure. The two agents, Henri and Felix, were sent to America to get something on Jacobs. He tempted them with his thriving side-line and they fell. Using our secret sign, the winged snake, they were able easily and safely to forward the diamonds through minor agents of our office. When my wife reported they were in partnership with Jacobs and lining their own pockets, it was all up with them. We do not employ half measures in the Bureau — to the faithful comes reward, and to the unfaithful a swift, sure end. She begged the privilege of shooting Henri. Some other was instructed in regard to Felix. The law of obedience is our law of life. You know the result!

"Begged the privilege of shooting," I murmured. "Affectionate — tender."

"*Hélas,* Mademoiselle, you do not understand! These charming ladies of America, whose highest purpose is appearance, make life a garden for a season, each bud delicious. But our European women weld the line of centuries. Like oak trees their roots are deep and strong, their branches spreading, and their hearts iron — and they are proudly beautiful. You think my wife's action unnatural. I say it was magnificent. Devastating, hein? But magnificently natural as an electric storm. Remember the Magyar strain — her love, her ambition. Remember that Italian woman's son had robbed her of her whole life — the life of accomplishment — the life that counts. Then he flung the facts in Mathilda's face, knowing, if she made them public, she became a laughing stock. He was the child of our hereditary enemy; his course a disgrace to our name, and a menace to our country. She was right to kill him — but it broke her. She couldn't forgive — and she couldn't forget — the little chap he used to be. She went to pieces badly afterward, and Jacobs hid her in his own place and communicated with me. But of course she would not have had me interfere. She was great — great. The only woman I ever loved."

He sat quite silent gazing into the empty dispatch box, so symbolic of his empty life — following that little affair with Louise.

I placed the key in his hand and folded his thin fingers over it. A tear splashed on to his well manicured nails.

"American — softness — charm — vanity," he murmured, and seemed to forget all about us.

Outside while Terry changed his tire Duffy talked loudly of how the old lady's death had broken the

Baron up. "But he'll recover, mark my words, he'll break the bank at Monte Carlo yet. Born to do it — I say so and I'm never — ha, ha! Lots of people have been wrong about that, haven't they? Ha, ha!"

My mind whirled, at one instant I was von Rathgartz's adopted son in person, the next I was giving a too familiar name to a ship's officer. Duffy boomed unheeded.

"Didn't understand half of his story — de Grasse a pal of yours I take it, and Jacobs too — and Jim Gower. Say, you must tell me all about this some other time — you're a regular big game hunter, Baroness!" And in a hurried voice, leaning his arms on the car door as Terry cranked her.

"You're a pretty live wire, my girl, but not too bright for little Willie; I sized up the situation on the *Carbothia* all right, as soon as you mentioned Jim — great chap Jim Gower, shipped his wine in variety and thought about drinking it later. You were jealous of the other skirt. You hugged your cabin. Ha, ha! I spotted you. Some time when you're feeling friendly call me at the factory — set your night and you'll not lose by it. I always know what I want — any line that's good enough for Gower is good enough for me."

I had advanced the spark and shoved back the gas as he talked. The rattle of the engine died suddenly so that his last words fell sharp on the still night air. There was a rush from the front, the quick impact of heavy bodies, the sound of falling — a moment later we had rounded the factory corner and were racing away down the interminable long white road. Surprise gave place to pride. No man could have been more gloriously master than the Terrier in his punish-

ing attack. I gloated. I cherished a blurred memory of his blow; I confess to smiling happily over thought of the prostrate Duffy.

"Who was that damned impertinent fool?" my companion barked at last, and didn't listen to my answer.

Courage sank into my number fours. Since I quit being a dual personality, I haven't got the proper fighting spirit, and I certainly didn't want to fight with Terry. How much had he heard? Could he possibly misunderstand? What had been said about Gower, the notorious libertine? I racked my brains to remember. Silence and glumness were so unlike Terry. The mood looked serious.

On and on we sped. Fields changed to lawns and houses strung themselves on either hand, changing again to shops. The regular lights of the city streets floated toward us. Astonished pedestrians turned to gape as we dashed ahead into the very heart of the town. Traffic thickened. Terry eased off a bit, and when our gait had settled into a gentle roll he turned to me. As a manager he was a martinet. We all knew the set of his jaw. I wasn't expecting any bridal bouquets. I realized he bulked a little larger than anything else on my horizon and held my breath as he slowed to the curb. Was he minded to sack me then and there?

"Clarissa," he said sternly, "when will you marry me and put an end to all this nonsense?"

"We're in New Jersey now," I merely mentioned.

When I came up for air he roared at me, "Are you ready?" and I answered:

"Shoot!"

THE END

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